

WOMEN BEHIND MAHATMA GANDHI

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GANDHI

by

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PREFACE

THIS BOOK really began more than a quarter of a century ago, when one afternoon at the home of friends my husband and I heard Rabindranath Tagore in a reading of his poems, with a talk on India following. During a short conversation later, he spoke of Gandhi as a new national leader; it was the first time that I had ever heard of him.

In the years that followed I met many of Gandhi's friends and co-workers as well as many of his adversaries, both Indian and British. When Sarojini Naidu lectured here on the India problem, as Gandhi was attacking it, I heard her and spoke with her. Later, Madeleine Slade, Miraben, came to Pendle Hill, our Quaker graduate school of religion and social studies; I heard her speak on India and met her personally. I heard Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit speak before audiences, and was present at interviews given to the press. I met Annie Besant through friends, when – as an old woman – she came on a lecture tour to America. I met Sushila Nayyar when she was a guest at Pendle Hill and after addresses given before various groups. I met Chakravarty, Gandhi's disciple, after his address before a Friends' Meeting, and heard him speak before other audiences also. At the homes of friends, S. Burns Weston and Jennie May Fels, I met Ramsay MacDonald and Lord Harry Snell. When Winston Churchill lectured here shortly after the First World War, I heard him and spoke with him briefly. The public debate between his son, Randolph Churchill, and Dhan Goupal Mikurji, which was presented under the auspices of the Philadelphia Forum, was preceded for myself by an interview with Mr. Churchill, arranged through the aid of our friend William K. Huff, the Forum director; Dhan Goupal Mikurji was a friend of ours. When I was in London in 1936, I heard accounts of Gandhi's 1931 visit from those who had been with him there. I met Muriel Lester and heard her speak a number of times.

Originally, I began gathering material for a book on Gandhi and his wife. It was inevitable that it should expand, to include at least some of the other women who also have given their lives, as did Kasturbai Gandhi, to his vision. Incidentally, the reader will find that the spelling of Mrs. Gandhi's name changes from Kasturbai to Kasturba in the latter part of the book, and will find the reason therefore.

Our two friends, Har and Agda Erickson Dayal, who knew Gandhi's work well, read to me often from Indian writings on the great Mahatma, translating aloud. Nellie Lee Bok, who spent a short time in Gandhi's ashram, has told me how deeply her experience influenced her thinking. Many spoke of Gandhi's wife, with her inarticulate and wholly unlettered devotion to him and his work.

To name all who have provided me with material would be impossible. There have been countless personal letters, conversations, interviews; literally thousands of clippings have been lent me as well as hundreds of magazine articles; and I have read many scores of books. Writing would have been impossible even to undertake, without these. But among those to whom I feel particularly indebted are: Anna C. Brinton, co-director of Pendle Hill, with whom the thesis of this book was discussed and who gave me valuable data obtained in her stay in India for the American Friends Service Committee; Clarence E. Pickett, honorary secretary of the American Friends Service Committee, who helped me evaluate the place of Gandhi and his followers in India's struggle; Horace Alexander, British Friend, long a close associate of Gandhi and of many in the ashrams, who gave me valuable information on the contemporary story of a number of Gandhi disciples, as well as a friend's analysis of Gandhi - his character, his intellectual genius and the far greater genius he possessed as spiritual leader; Mordecai Johnson, president of Howard University, who provided me with data concerning Sevagram Ashram today; Cherian Thomas, visiting student from India, who gave me information about a number of the people in the book; Gouri Bose, visiting student invited here by the United States Government, who told me current facts concerning the work and lives of those of Gandhi's women disciples who are still living.

To these must be added the many visitors from India and

England whom I have had the privilege of meeting and who have been kind enough to share their knowledge of the Mahatma and his life-mission as well as their knowledge of the story of the men and women who helped him achieve it.

E. M.

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To many friends – impossible to name because of sheer limitations of space – I give deep gratitude for gracious assistance in providing opportunities to meet and speak with many of the people in this book, among them Annie Besant, Sushila Nayyar, Madam Naidu, Madam Pandit, Miraben, Churchill, Snell, MacDonald, Mikurji, Tagore and many others – whose lives touched Gandhi's. Without these friends, the book could not have been planned, and completed.

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I

KASTURBAI NAKANJI

AN EXTREMELY small girl with satiny black hair, delicately formed nose and immense eyes in a quite lovely, wilful face, played in the garden of a handsome house in Porbandar, the 'White City' rising straight from the Arabian Sea on the western coast of Gujarat India, on the Kathiawar Peninsula. A group of men were with the girl's father, Gokuldas Nakanji. Member of the Bania (merchant) caste and successful Hindu businessman, he could permit himself generous hospitality. Strangers, shipping magnates, beggars and priests, all came to his house.

In Porbandar State, fine residences customarily had charming ceilings exquisitely inlaid, teakwood walls beautifully carved, broad verandahs opening on gardens large enough for gracious living. Although there prevailed in Gujarat a particularly rigid form of exclusion, with women isolated in their own quarters and not merely restricted to hiding behind screens or curtains when in the presence of men, little girls enjoyed comparative liberty until puberty or marriage.

Nakanji's daughter was given the run of house and garden. But even if she glimpsed the present visitors with her father, she could not have known why they came. They were priests and astrologers. They had come to complete details of her betrothal, in solemn traditional rites.

Her name was Kasturbai. She was seven years old. Her affianced was called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and he too was seven years of age.

The day and hour had been meticulously chosen, with the aid of the astrological charts of both children. Customarily, the barber or barber's wife would suggest a match, but because the Gandhis had once been neighbours of the Nakanjis there was no need for intermediaries. Mutual friends could attest to the perfection of Kasturbai's little body, to her unblemished flower-

like skin, sweet breath, and luxuriant tresses, all obligatory female attributes. It was plain that she was destined to grow into great beauty.

Two earlier betrothals made for small Mohandas had ended by the deaths of the girl infants involved, providing a fortunate opportunity for Nakanji, which he eagerly grasped. For the boy's father was a dewan, or premier, who had first served the rajah at the petty princely court of Porbandar State, and now held the like post at Rajkot, a hundred and twenty miles away. For three generations the Gandhis, though members originally of the merchant caste, had been premiers to rulers of small Kathiawar states. Nakanji had wealth; the Gandhis possessed prestige – a commodity devoutly desired by Hindu fathers.

Although axiomatically a daughter was born as punishment for sins committed in a man's previous incarnations, Kasturbai was given tender, doting love. Like other girls in well-to-do Bania homes, she tossed coloured balls and twined ribbons about tall poles in evening games. She sang the ancient songs of her people. On warm afternoons she joined the small fry clustering about the women, as servants opened jewel-adorned cedarwood chests to lift out, for a sunning and airing, brilliant saris, fragile veils and transparent woollens that had been made by master craftsmen of the ancient weaving and dyeing castes. But she had not the passivity, the pliancy, the inhibitions stamped on the other girl children. She was vividly, buoyantly alive; she was swift and sturdy as a boy. These were qualities in her which might well have provided cause for hesitancy, had they been noted by the people of her future husband.

Neither she nor the little boy were informed of the betrothal arranged between them. The year was 1876.

In England there had been introduced before Parliament a bill to name Victoria the 'Empress of India.' Some accused her Prime Minister, Disraeli, of 'yielding to the whim of the Queen' thereby. Actually, he had used his subtle genius to persuade her of the political necessity to assume the title, as one way of inducing the Indian princes and peoples to accept the concept of a British Empire, of which they would be part. At a grand durbar at Ahmedabad it had been announced – nearly two decades earlier – that India was to be under the British Crown henceforward, liberated, after more than a century, from

the misrule of the East India Company. In an admirable state document the Queen promised true British justice; there was to be amnesty to political prisoners. In 1869 – the very year that both Kasturbai and Mohandas were born – Lord Mayo was sent as still another Viceroy, with instructions to establish a system of education from grade school to university level, so that nineteenth century progress might infiltrate the country. The hope was to bridge the abyss dividing West from East.

This year of 1876, Albert, Prince of Wales, was completing a prolonged tour planned as a gesture of goodwill. Rajahs vied with one another in processions, spectacles, entertainments, in princely gifts showered upon the heir to Britain's throne.

But hatred of the British did not wane. British education was largely shunned. Astoundingly, this was due to the women of India. They who could neither read nor write, to whom such knowledge would indeed have been unseemly, formed a barrier against acceptance of European schooling and culture. They held their men inflexibly to the past. They stood as guardians of tradition, the basis of their religion. They who had no rights, no power, for years halted the programme planned by Victoria's advisers, thus triumphing over the female ruler in England. Western women pitied the women of India. If a trace of such pity reached the high-caste Hindu lady, her response could have been only amused, amazed disdain. Tragedy often entered her life, she knew. But how could creatures who exposed their naked faces to public view comprehend that 'behind the screen' were found protection, distinction? To achieve these, girls were married early, sometimes in very infancy. Kasturbai had friends, her own age, who had been wives for some years.

In Porbandar Town, the capital of Porbandar State, what happened in England would be known only in the rajah's court. There was neither railway nor newspaper. Except for the sound of birds along the coast, the rumble of oxcarts on bazaar days, the dog cry of some poor Untouchable warning of his polluting approach, the quietude remained unbroken. Life followed paths set more than a thousand years ago. Possibly not even at the tiny princely court was there news of a 'Centennial Exhibition' which was being held in the United States, at Philadelphia, to celebrate a hundred years of independence and to mark the new

great era of industry that had come with the advent of railroads and machines.

Such matters could have held no interest to women in purdah, for whom concern centred in the household. Vital events were birth and death, marriage, betrothal. For Kasturbai's mother, no news relating to the world outside her home could have surpassed the announcement by her husband that their daughter was now pledged as future wife to one of Dewan Gandhi's sons.

On 1 January, 1877, Queen Victoria was proclaimed 'Empress of India' at a resplendent ceremony in Delhi. How could it have been conceived that the betrothal of an unknown little girl to an equally obscure small boy had begun a story which was to end in the breaking apart of the Empire inaugurated by Disraeli for Victoria of England?

2

KASTURBAI

NO DATE for Kasturbai's marriage was set, and the small girl remained unaware that she had been betrothed. But she knew that she was daily receiving training to prepare her for the career of wife and mother. That was the life-task of all women.

There were the Five Great Rules to learn – not to lie, not to steal, not to be unchaste, not to hold strongly to worldly things, not to forget prayers. Religion was a way of life. Older women saw that the rules were followed. Because cleanliness was in their faith a religious duty, every pot and pan, each utensil and dish, all corners of house and garden must be kept immaculate. The stern dietary restrictions imposed upon Hindus made knowledge of cookery obligatory to women of a household. Gokuldas Nakanji as practical businessman was no mystic, no ascetic; his family lived well if not extravagantly. There were many servants, but a measure of simplicity was imposed upon the home, because otherwise the weakness of worldly vanity would have been expressed.

The women were alert to see that no Untouchable polluted a child by the touch of a garment, an arm. They were careful to have all water drawn by the Brahmin cook or water boy. Water for baths was gathered in a marble tank filled during the rains. The women and girls bathed in their own quarters. Sharp watch was kept to make certain that no lad, no man, entered the female section of the house; not even a husband could intrude there, to see his wife.

A tiny girl had her own assigned duties to perform. By example and by practice, was instruction received.

To cherish lovely garments and jewellery, Kasturbai saw, was not worldly vanity, but religious observance. The women in her family placed bracelets on their arms and rings on their fingers as amulets to ward off evil. Jewels were necessary at all bodily orifices – nostrils, ears, throat, pudenda. Beads of gold and of wood made from the tulasi tree had especial efficacy in keeping away misfortune; they must therefore be worn in necklaces by all means.

In the busy life of the great joint household – occupied in work, prayer and with kinspeople, friends – the eldest woman, the mother, was supreme. She supervised the servants, decided what food should be cooked and how much; to her were responsible all the small children, the daughters-in-law, the daughters not married. Although unable to read, she taught the youngsters their prayers, and from the teaching she herself had long ago received, she gave reverent recital of what she could remember of the legends and myths of ancient gods and heroes. This she did as a task laid upon her by the father of the house.

But, as Kasturbai came to understand quickly, chief among the duties of a married woman was to please the husband. All else fell before that. Vatsayana, author of the Kamsutra, the treatise on love, said centuries ago:

A virtuous woman that hath affection for her husband shall in all things act according to his wishes as if it were divine . . .

Always she shall sit down after him and rise before him, and when she hears the sound of his footsteps as he returns home, she shall get up and meet him, and do all he wishes . . .

If the husband is wrong she shall not unduly reproach him, but show him a slight displeasure and rebuke him in words of fondness and affection . . .

And when she goes to her husband, when they are alone she will wear bright coloured garments and many jewels and anklets and will perfume herself with sweet ointments and in her hair place flowers . . .

In her home, Kasturbai could observe that her father was supreme. Only when he had eaten could the women and girls and small boys have food served in the female section of the house.

Maintaining and enhancing beauty was a basic responsibility of women. In many gardens grew mehndee trees, the leaves of which when crushed and moistened with lime water made a lotion that stained the skin an attractive red. Kasturbai saw women apply the lotion to the soles of their slender feet conscientiously, as a rite, every two or three weeks. She saw perfumes brushed into dark hair, and oils massaged into the fine skin of faces and throats and pretty knees. These things were essential. They were part of remaining lovely to the husband.

A girl growing toward adolescence was taken by her mother to call on other women in purdah. When Kasturbai and her mother would arrive, in their curtained carriage, they would make their leisurely way to the women awaiting them, and every man – from the servants to the master of the house – would scurry away. Women prized their separateness, their privacy, Kasturbai could see. Their conversation was customarily concerned with the drama of family life; in their lives sex played a paramount part, necessarily. To them the recent British proscription of suttee (self-immolation of a widow on the burning pyre of her husband) seemed only nonsense. Unless she could be a wife, what function had any woman in the living world? Since it was forbidden her to remarry, the only course was to die, mingling her ashes with those of her lord. That child marriage was also frowned upon by the authorities was dismissed by the Indian women. In their eyes, such marriages were protection against the constant danger of loss of chastity, since in the large Indian households there were often gathered under one roof wedded and unmarried sons, growing grandsons, even

orphaned nephews. If a girl lost her virginity, her salvation in future incarnations was gone also. The seclusion of purdah was therefore to be prized. Manu, the law-giver of India, had enjoined centuries ago: 'Let the father of a girl, even if she is not yet of marriageable age, give her to a suitor who is handsome, high-born.'

Nevertheless, Kasturbai Nakanji remained unmarried, at ten, at eleven years, an age at which many children all over India were already wedded. Child wives occasionally lived in their husbands' homes until they attained the puberty that made consummation of marriage possible. But Kasturbai reached the early adolescence of Eastern women, and still she was not married. She was growing into a young creature of astonishing beauty, but she remained with the children in her father's household. The separateness, the privacy of seclusion were not hers.

Then in 1882 signs suddenly appeared of an approaching, momentous event. Consultations were being held with priests. Whispered conversations were taking place with the barber's wife. Garments were soon being made for Kasturbai. Now she knew that preparations were in progress for a wedding, and she learned that she had been betrothed for nearly six years. Soon, she would be a bride.

Famine was raging that year in India. Poor people by many millions were starving in their wretched hovels of thatch and clay. But marriage festivities of a well-to-do family must be costly enough to dim expensive ordinary festivities. In Rajkot, Premier Gandhi must meet his panchayat — the Bania caste committee; at Porbandar, Gokuldas Nakanji must appear before his. Both fathers were required to state how many were to be invited to the wedding, what food would be served, what entertainment was to be provided. The panchayat set minimum standards of acceptance in each of the three categories. Were a man to plead poverty, he would be informed that his 'financial and social position are too high for lesser outlay.' If it proved that he was indeed unable to pay for the feasts and entertainment as ordered, he was expected to give future dinners until the sum originally set was fully spent.

Many a father of moderate means went bankrupt to provide the kind of wedding ordained. Among the poor, who knew they

would be unable to carry out their religious duty of marrying off a daughter properly, the custom provided one reason for female infanticide. The rich, however, vied with one another in number and diversity of courses at feasts, in sumptuousness of dress and abundance of costly gifts. Nankanji could have found no sum set him too large for the occasion which would see his daughter united with a dewan's son.

For Gandhi it was a different matter. He had made a name for himself in two small Kathiawar courts, attaining honour in both little states because of his wisdom, genuine piety and a certain nobility as well. Long ago he had left his post at the rajah's court in Porbandar because of the ruler's licentiousness; Gandhi had not hesitated to state his reasons. There was in him a rugged manly courage to pass on to his sons. But his income was not large.

The sum expected to be spent on a son's wedding was to him a small fortune. With Bania shrewdness and innate common sense, he worked out a plan. Another of his sons was still unmarried. His favourite brother had an unmarried son left. Why not arrange a joint wedding for the three boys? 'It would be,' said Gandhi, 'less expensive, with greater éclat. And money can be spent freely, if it need only be spent once – not thrice.'

His brother agreed. Finding girls whose horoscopes fitted in with those of the two older lads was not easy, but the dewan was a man of energy and resourcefulness, and two female children were found at Porbandar, where earlier Mohandas, the youngest boy, had been betrothed.

Months of preparation followed at the homes of the girls and boys alike. All the families were large; hundreds of guests must be invited. Thousands of cooking utensils would be required; countless silver pieces would be needed on fine cloths spread out upon immaculate floors. Scores of extra servants must be hired. Drummers and flutists and singers would be engaged by each of the families involved.

Gandhi spent unstintingly on his portion of costs. Nakanji, as father of the wealthiest of the brides, spent much more. He showered Kasturbai with jewellery – bracelets for her slender arms, anklets for her small feet, armlets, necklaces, rings for her shapely nostrils, for her ears, golden ornaments inset with precious stones to be worn at the temples, on her breast, in her

hair. Banias had no bridal price, but even the poorest girl received from her people an appropriate treasure of jewellery, which remained her personal property until she died, not to be touched by her husband.

Preparations were completed. The wedding day neared.

But the Gandhis almost failed to appear. The rajah at Rajkot had informed his premier that state matters demanded the dewan's remaining at court; the wedding could wait. From Rajkot to Porbandar took five days by oxcart. Reaching the city in time was impossible. How could a marriage date be changed?

Marriage was the union of families, of destinies, not of individuals.

Then – as unexpectedly as he had demanded delay – the petty ruler exercised his prerogative of magnanimity. He offered the royal carriages and horses. Two days would be cut by their use. Porbandar could be reached in time, after all. Women, children, servant maids, were crowded into vehicles; the premier, the boys, his brother and men servants, in other carriages. The party set off at top speed.

Along the way, the coach in which Premier Gandhi rode was overturned, and he was badly hurt. It was necessary to bandage him from head to foot. Still, he declared that 'the ceremonies must be now or never,' and though he was in great pain, the journey continued.

They arrived just in time. In spite of his injuries, the old father carried out all that was expected of him. He saw to it that the boys went to the house rented for their use in Porbandar. He had the barbers bathe and comb and dress the youngsters in their sumptuous wedding garments. He made sure that the baskets of jewellery to be taken to the brides were properly displayed; it was the duty of a bridegroom's father to present jewellery of a specified value to his son's bride.

Litters were brought to the house. The three boys, perfumed and garlanded, climbed into them, to be carried forth to the city streets, each heading his own procession in his gaily painted palanquin. Musicians played as the long line of followers wound through the paths and lanes of Porbandar. Youngest of the lads was Mohandas, not quite thirteen. He sat in his litter, barely looking at the throngs past whom he was being carried, but on his pale face was an expression of wonder and touching ex-

pectancy. It was clear that he felt as much overwhelmed as exhilarated by the attention given him; he seemed frail and small in his elaborate marriage raiment.

Hidden in the homes of their parents, three little girls were waiting.

They too had been bathed, combed, perfumed and richly dressed. Although the groom had paramount place, the bride also had her part to take in the rites, yet now there was nothing to do except wait until the bridegroom's procession was near.

It was announced that the litter carrying Mohandas Gandhi was coming.

Kasturbai was carried to her exquisitely decorated bridal litter. A procession of relatives and friends following, she was taken through the streets to meet the bridegroom. Singers, flutes, drums, ancient metal-stringed instruments, together made happy music. A feel of salt and sea was in the twilight air.

At the wedding booth was a boy's figure, resplendent in raiment. Kasturbai's own tiny form, swathed in white silks from head to feet, was lifted down by the barber's wife, hired for traditional services during the ceremony. The barber was present for like tasks in aid of the little boy. The ancient sacred ceremonies began.

Adults whispered words which the children repeated. Someone tied Kasturbai's sari to the scarf of the lad. More words, more prayers followed. Mohandas was given a piece of jewellery to hand to the girl. There stepped forward a woman, stately in rich sari. This was Putlibai Gandhi, mother of the boy. She had the walk of a queen and her face was gentle, grave. She took the girl's hand and placed it in the hand of Mohandas.

Further rites, still more prayers. Then the two children were told to take seven steps about the marriage post; that was 'Septapadi.' The boy was given some bits of sweet cake, 'kansar,' to put into Kasturbai's mouth, and she some to place in his. They could not have known the symbolism of what they were told to do.

Now their marriage was irrevocable.

A third of a century later, Mohandas Gandhi was to remember 'the look of content' on his father's face. Although his brother Karsandas and the cousin were being married too, it seemed to the boy that he was the centre of everything. For the

first time in his short life he knew that ' all was wonderfully right, proper, pleasing.'

He was hardly aware of the small figure, veiled and fragrant, beside him on the wedding dais.

Festivities were to continue for a week. The premier - bandaged, bruised, but undaunted and beaming cheerfully - said that he ' meant to have the last best time ' of his life at the festivities. Women were singing. Servants were serving food. Musicians were busy with their instruments, making a joyful noise.

While guests and kinspeople ate and sang and laughed, the new groom and bride were sent off to become man and wife in reality. Two children began life together as the door of their room closed upon them.

3

KASTURBAI GANDHI

KASTURBAI FACED the husband to whom her father had given her. She saw a very little boy, short even for an Indian of his age, thin as a wand. His huge ears were pierced, to ward off evil spirits. His nose was thick and big. His black hair was so wiry that it would not lie smoothly on the large head supported by a fragile neck. Although his hands were strong, their fingers particularly well shaped and long, the arms were bony, weak. His chest was surprisingly broad; but the rest of his body bespoke a sickly youngster, ugly to the point of drollness.

He stood timid and speechless. The girl likewise made no sound.

The boy was too shy to look at her, not even knowing how to begin speaking with her. He had always been afraid of people. He ran from other boys at school, lest they poke fun at him. He took solitary walks because he could never feel at ease with playfellows. He had never made a friend. Only with his adored mother, who loved and shielded him, had he ever known calmness and peace, through all the years of his life.

His elder brothers, Laxmidas and Karsandas, had never taken much note of him. His father had left the ailing, youngest child largely to the mother. Only when his wedding was being arranged for, did he seem to draw attention from others in his family.

At home in Rajkot he had discovered – merely because of arrangements being made – that he was to be married. Through marriage, one attained wearing of the Sacred Thread, woven from seven strands and hung, with priestly blessing, from a boy's left shoulder to the right side. Usually, the Thread was given a lad at the age of thirteen. But, if he married earlier, the honour was acquired as wedded male.

Small Mohandas Gandhi had put a hesitant question or two, for he wanted to understand what marriage would mean to him, what was expected of a boy, and how to prepare for the married state. He did not hope for much attention; he was the youngest child. But some of his elders seemed to feel that an answer of sorts was due him. With oblique smiles, they told him there would be prayers and feasting, and that he 'would have a strange girl to play with' thereafter. Because of his timidity and self-distrust, he had found in this answer a promise extraordinary, wonderful. He had never expected to have a play-fellow. He had never had the courage to find one.

The splendour of his wedding had exalted him. His clothing had been as costly as that of the two older boys. Now the wedding was over. His new self-belief seemed to have deserted him. He felt once again that inadequacy which he had experienced all his life.

What was he to say to his bride?

He was terrified of her and of himself.

Before leaving Rajkot, the wife of his eldest brother, Laxmidas, had come over and hesitantly murmured a few words, explaining, she said, 'some things expected of a husband.' He could not recall a word she had said, had indeed not really understood what she whispered to him. He had himself chanced to find at the bazaar a pamphlet giving 'advice to young husbands.' He had bought it and pored over its pages, yet now he could not remember what he had read. He had not understood most of it, at the time.

The girl with him, he realized, was as much afraid of him as

he of her. Perhaps he sensed – because he possessed an intuition concerning the feelings of others – that there were things which Kasturbai by her very stillness was saying.

She did not lift her eyes to him, after the first swift glance. Their caste rarely sanctioned polygamous marriages. Nakanji had shielded his daughter from the heartbreak of future rivals; this was to be a monogamous union always. But the bridegroom confronting her was far from the princely being described in the words of Manu.

At thirteen she was not mature enough to recognize that the boy's eyes – big and brown and soft as velvet – were strikingly beautiful, singularly appealing. The chin was small, rather retreating, giving his pale face almost comical proportions, the nose dominating all. Perhaps an older bride might have noted that the mouth under that heavy nose was rich and sensual. It was like the mouth of Premier Gandhi, himself a man of strong passions.

The children could hear the loud chanting of songs outside their apartment. People were consuming food served in elaborate, wasteful profusion. But these two had been sent off alone, to have sexual union, to consummate their marriage and begin a child thereby.

Whether Kasturbai had received advice analogous to that given Mohandas in his home, he was never to know to the end of his wife's years. It may be assumed that an older woman in the Nakanji house had whispered to the little girl what must be expected, what must be accepted. However, as Mohandas himself was to write later, past incarnations in which he and the girl 'had been other men, other women,' came to their aid 'to instruct them' as child husband and wife.

In middle years, he was to recall with compassion that 'two children all unwittingly hurled themselves into the ocean of life.'

Kasturbai remained silent. She submitted only. There was a 'reticence' in her, realized by the boy, which was to remain always, as a wall between them both.

Presently, the feasts, the entertainments ended. The girl could prepare to leave her father's house for her husband's home. Her bright saris, her many jewels, and her beauty were to become part of the Gandhi household.

The carriages lent by Rajkot's rajah were harnessed for the

return. Kasturbai was not placed with her husband but with his mother, Putlibai. She would live with the Gandhi family until she died. If she became pregnant, she might come back briefly to Porbandar. A child wife by custom visited her home also for part of every year, even if she did not conceive, during the early time of her marriage.

4

PUTLIBAI GANDHI

IN ALL INDIA there were few women to compare with Putlibai Gandhi, in her obscure household at Rajkot. Queen Victoria in England did not receive more reverence from those about her. Dewan Gandhi had married four times, three wives dying in childbirth. As fourth bride – although he was then an ‘old man’ of perhaps forty – he took a girl beautiful and very young. Like her predecessors, she bore him first a daughter, but thereafter three sons in succession. It was proof enough of her piety and favour with the gods. Her children were all married now, even to the youngest, Mohandas. Their wives were brought to her for guidance daily. Frivolity, self-indulgence, were inconceivable with her. She gave her own husband the devotion of a profoundly religious spouse, but the pleasures of the body – including rich foods, costly garments, jewellery – meant little to her. She lived almost as an ascetic, less in the material than in the spiritual world.

Until he was six, when the premier sent him, as was expected, to the British school, the little boy had never left his mother; at school he waited only for classes to end, that he might fly back to her side. When he grew older, he still continued to cling to her. When not with her he played his accordion, alone; he rolled his hoop alone. Though by no means an able pupil, he sought refuge in his books if she were not near. What she was and did determined his thinking, his being. If, later, psychiatrists should see in such dependence the substance of great future unhappiness, during his childhood there were none to point this

out. Putlibai was honoured because she lavished love on her boy, who was homely, sickly since birth, and in need of her.

On marriage he, like his two brothers, was given an apartment in the house to share with his wife. Husbands and wives did not see one another the day through; to meet and particularly to show affection before others in the large household would for a high-caste Hindu have been unthinkable vulgarity. After breakfast, Mohandas left for school. Rajkot, through its Political Agent, representing the Crown, had more importance than did Porbandar. There were excellent schools, with first-rate instruction – and even some sports to imbue students with British ideals of sportsmanship. Mohandas, though rejecting sports, bathed in the Aji River, or took long walks in the woods after classes. Kasturbai, however, had no school, and no longer any childish play, to fill the hours. For those shut away in purdah, there were only visits at the garden temple or calls occasionally upon other purdah women, to fill the long days when assigned chores were done and the daily instruction in religion ended.

Putlibai Gandhi made instruction of the young females and children a spiritual experience, as would a priest, although she was unlettered even in her native Gujarati, the tongue of daily speech. For her, teaching was not a perfunctory task, a colourless repetition of ancient hymns and legends. It was a solemn obligation, to be carried out as a holy duty.

Elegance and beauty were expected in a Hindu wife. She wore her sari with grace; she stained her feet red; she encircled her wrists and ankles and arms with heavy golden bangles. Yet – though not a member of the Jain sect, most mystical of their Vaishnava faith – she was profoundly austere, her tenets based on self-denial, with fasting not only at prescribed times, but on days personally set, in vows made to her gods.

The basis of what she believed, and therefore of her way of life, was *Ahimsa*, which meant literally ‘non-injury, non-violence.’ (And this non-violence was the basis of that ‘identification with everything that lives’ which Gandhi was to say later must precede the ‘perfect vision of Truth.’) Its expression was the foregoing of violence in any form, to any living creature, even an insect, since in the insect might be a human soul, punished for sins committed in past incarnation.

Once, as Putlibai sat with the class in a circle about her on the cool floor, while she told the legend of their god Krishna, a youngster cried out, terrified. Creeping to Putlibai's bare, painted foot was a deadly scorpion. She said quietly: 'Let us all sit very still.' The insect crept upon her sari. Gently she gathered the creature into a silken fold, walked to the window and dropped it to the earth outside. Returning, she smiled: 'You see? I did not hurt it. And therefore it did not hurt me.'

Very pale among the rest, Mohandas sat with eyes fixed on her as she gave this lesson to the children. Many years later Victoria, Empress of India, was to hear the lesson which Putlibai Gandhi taught that day in Rajkot.

Ahimsa and its connection with truth became the foundation of Mohandas' own boyish relationships. At school a teacher once beat him when he had given as excuse for tardiness that he had been needed at home to help care for his sick father. The boy flew home in tears, not because he was whipped, but because it had been thought he could tell falsehoods. He had accepted the beating itself without protest, of course. He never struck back at the schoolfellows who struck him. Like his mother, he could not hurt a living thing.

Putlibai Gandhi nonetheless knew also how to be a great lady, in the small state. When she had taken Mohandas, as a tiny boy, on visits to the women of the rajah's court, he observed that the hostesses listened to his mother attentively, and that the chief lady did not disguise her regard for the wisdom of the dewan's wife when matters of court were discussed. Putlibai Gandhi, although so much younger than her husband, was his confidant. With her saintliness were combined discernment and wisdom.

She fixed, for her youngest son, his standards for all women. No greater contrast could have been arranged than that between his mother and his bride. How could Kasturbai fit into the pattern of a saint? The mother of Mohandas was dedicated to self-sacrifice, service, devotion. Kasturbai, daughter of a successful, matter-of-fact merchant, had been taught to enjoy everyday pleasures, fine jewellery, brightly coloured garments, and the chitchat of women busy with commonplace tasks. Gokuldas Nakanji believed in honesty, straight-forwardness, but also in good profits and comfortable living on an abundant

income. Mysticism, austerity, were not a part of a daughter's environment at his house.

In the Gandhi household, it was necessary that Putlibai impose a measure of economy. Feeding and clothing the big joint family was a heavy burden on the premier's moderate income. Putlibai's gentle rule made saving acceptable to the younger women; she was in no way the tyrant of unhappy legend, the mother-in-law described by the dread phrase, 'She Who Must Be Obeyed.' It was not uncommon for daughters-in-law to ingratiate themselves with their husband's mother by resorting to tricks, to subterfuge, even to cause division between the all-powerful older woman and her own still unmarried daughters remaining at home. Such methods could have won no favour with Putlibai Gandhi. For her youngest daughter-in-law Kasturbai, it would have been impossible to seek status through flattery or subterfuge.

Kasturbai remained candid, self-confident, unafraid. There was in her still much of a sturdy small boy; she could never scheme for status. She would refuse to do whatever she could not believe right to do, however wretched it made her.

But her mother-in-law could not but have perceived, very soon, that her youngest boy and his bride were two very unhappy young people. She must have realized, quickly, that Mohandas was a bewildered lad. It was the custom for the Gandhi family, as for other Hindu households, to gather after supper, just as twilight fell, to listen to a pundit, a learned man, read aloud from their Sacred Scriptures, with explanations of the Sanskrit text interposed while reading. When Mohandas, as a tiny boy, had heard a Brahmin reading to their family from the *Ramayana* – one of India's two great epics – he had listened with big eyes fixed on the holy man as the noble verses, one after another, were intoned. Now, again, the premier had invited a scholar to read to the household; this time there was being presented to them the beauty of the *Bhagavad Gita*, the philosophical dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna. From behind the curtains, where the women sat invisible to their men, Putlibai could see that Mohandas was barely listening. He was wholly indifferent to the reading, this time.

Even Premier Gandhi was aware that their lad was much pre-occupied.

The old dewan, an invalid since his accident, permitted his youngest son the coveted privilege of helping nurse the father. Guests of many faiths came to visit the bedridden man. Gandhi had always enjoyed discussing the different faiths and backgrounds of men unlike his own people. Yet Mohandas seemed unable to appreciate these opportunities of hearing what strangers said and thought.

It was Putlibai Gandhi who shortly discovered the reasons for the grave anxieties of her little son. Mohandas was aware that when his two elder brothers, Laxmidas and Karsandas, retired to their own apartments, their wives received them as kings, obeying every wish and whim. It was a woman's duty to acquiesce in the least wish of her husband, however foolish what he asked might be. Mohandas, though afraid of being spoken to, afraid to speak, afraid of mockery, wanted desperately to have his wife pay him honour as husband. Beginning with the night of his marriage, a struggle had arisen between himself and Kasturbai, which was not to end until a quarter of a century later. In a second pamphlet he had bought, the boy found further advice to a husband, with fidelity strongly stressed. He wanted, with all his heart, to be faithful to his own wife. He knew that he was 'passionately fond' of her, that at school he could only think of her endlessly, that it was impossible to concentrate on his lessons. The day through he was 'haunted' by the promise of meeting her again. She could be enchanting. She was bright and 'persevering in whatever interested her,' he had learned. But with him she remained 'very reticent,' in word and response both. Try as he might, he seemed incapable of drawing her unto himself, by pleading, by reproaches.

He never tired of talking with her, keeping her awake far into the night. Despite her lack of response, he knew that 'merely being with her could not be all unrelieved misery.' As he said, 'between us is an active love on one side at least.' He was eager to pledge fidelity to the end of his life, although to be sure there was not much danger of the contrary to a youngster of his tender years. But he felt that if faithfulness was exacted of the husband, his wife should pledge fidelity also.

Kasturbai would not do this. Her refusal tormented the boy. It seemed the denial of his right to her respect, of the honour due him as husband. Misery changed him into a jealous being, torn

by frustration and love. There was no fact to justify the jealousy, of course. But his incapacity to compel a vow of fidelity from her altered him presently into a carping little tyrant. He would force her to vow faithfulness, he would punish her, if she did not do as he asked. He could not compel her, she herself retorted.

An order was imposed by him, forbidding her to leave their apartment; the restraint was a sort of imprisonment. She flouted him, presently, by visiting the temple in their garden, calling on friends, going for a short stroll. The boy admitted to himself that 'she is not the one to brook such things' from him; his anger and fear mounted. He seemed no longer himself. A madness invaded his meagre young body. Furiously he determined that he 'must make her the ideal wife.' She only laughed at him.

She laughed at his fears. He feared the dark and serpents, ghosts and thieves. His fears required him to have lights burning the night long. Kasturbai blew out the lights; she ran into the darkness, and when the boy raced after her she outran him effortlessly.

Finally the two married children did not even speak to one another when they met at night in their own rooms.

At the year's end Mohandas failed his examinations. Karsandas did likewise, to be sure. The dewan commanded them both to study, and to pass. Very possibly it was Putlibai, in her wisdom, who suggested that Kasturbai be sent to her people, for a time. Mohandas had the satisfaction of telling himself he had made his wife 'thoroughly miserable.'

Toward her, he had completely rejected *Ahimsa*. Yet in her absence he was so lonely, that when he met a pariah boy, unknown to Putlibai, he made a sort of friend of the Untouchable, even bathing with the lad. With Kasturbai gone, he still found no peace. He wrote an urgent letter shortly, demanding that she be returned to him.

A plan came to him, a plan that only a boy isolated from his world could have conceived. He would invite Kasturbai to study with him, 'so that it would stir her to similar adventure.' Through study in common, surely they would have something to draw them close.

As soon as she returned he began a course of instruction. Since she was completely illiterate, he started with the alphabet. But she proved wholly 'indifferent' to education; her ignorance

'in no way troubled her,' he found. He could not awaken her interest at all.

Yet, even had she been zealous to learn, his passion would have come between them, he realized presently. Lessons could be given her only at night, when they retired to their quarters. Invariably, he would forget to be her teacher, and would turn into a demanding, feverishly exacting lover.

Quarrels became fiercer between them. Repeatedly, she was sent home to her people, only to be recalled by Mohandas.

The Hindu custom of separating young couples for part of the year in early marriage was fortunate for Mohandas. Otherwise, he would have been destroyed by consuming desire for his wife. Enforced separation from Kasturbai saved his frail health and perhaps his life.

Then – at fifteen – she was with child. During pregnancy, a wife was forbidden to her husband.

Thrown upon himself, the young boy plunged into study. He won prizes. But, wandering about lonely and disconsolate, he made friends with a chum of Karsandas, a glib youth called Mehta. The new friend talked of 'a wave of reform sweeping over Rajkot.' of 'high school teachers who are meat eaters and who took wine,' and of 'a lot of high school boys among them.' One of the boys was Karsandas Gandhi himself, it proved, to the unbelieving horror of Mohandas. Their mother would have been shocked beyond endurance, he knew – she who taught that the cardinal sins were drinking wine, smoking, associating with women and above all, eating of the flesh of animals, killed for food.

Mehta nonetheless insisted that 'we are a weak people because we do not eat meat,' that 'the British are able to rule over us because we are not meat eaters,' that his own prowess as runner and athlete stemmed from eating meat. He declared that he had become so strong he 'could hold serpents live' in his hands, could 'defy thieves,' 'did not believe in ghosts,' and all because of meat eating. He quoted to Mohandas a Gujarati schoolboy jingle:

Behold the mighty Englishman,
He rules the Indians small,
Because being a meat eater,
He is five cubits tall.



With all his heart, Mohandas wanted to be tall, strong, fearless. He asked himself: Would it be really sinful to take meat 'if it were done solely for reform,' if thereby the English *could* be overcome? Little by little his scruples were conquered by Mehta's talk. Finally he agreed to meet the other boy, to cook goat meat at the river bank.

The flesh they ate tasted to Mohandas - who had never tasted any other food than grains, vegetables, and fruits - as tough as wood. That night Kasturbai was wakened by his groaning; he sprang up from a nightmare. He had dreamed that he was swallowing a live goat, which bled inside his stomach. Nevertheless, he did not desist from his programme, with its purpose of growing large and brawny as an Englishman. When results did not seem to be appearing, Mehta explained it 'must take time.' They must eat at British restaurants, taking food from the foreign servants there.

Kasturbai was occupied with observing the successive rites of pregnancy, month by month - from the time she first felt herself to be with child, through the first time her baby moved within her, and on toward the ordeal of birth, awaiting. Putlibai, as mother-in-law, took her to the temple, instructed her in prayers to say and as to offerings to make before the gods. There was need to arrange for a mid-wife. In every Hindu home was a childbirth place, at best a tiny windowless room, filthy and as far from the rest of the house as possible. Since childbirth polluted a woman and all those aiding her, Untouchables were engaged as midwives. The mother lay, solitary, on a string cot, shut away from the whole family during her travail. Of what matter was agony, if a boy were brought forth? If a woman died in childbirth, as millions died annually in India, it was the will of the gods, to be accepted without question. One prayed to the deities for their kindness, their intercession; there could be no more done than this.

Yet, amidst prayers and preparations, Kasturbai saw that something unwholesome had entered her husband's life of late, and that Mehta was the cause. Mohandas came late from high school; he was nervous and intense in their apartments at night. He barely partook of food at meals. When, however, she tried to say something in warning against Mehta, Mohandas flared: 'How *dare* you advise me, the husband? How dare you have the

temerity to tell me what I should do? ' Furious quarrels followed.

Then one evening Putlibai asked Mohandas why he 'did not eat supper' with them. He gulped that he had 'a pain in the stomach and could not eat.' And suddenly he knew that he must tell his friend he would never touch meat again. To lie to his mother, in word or deed, was not possible.

The other boy merely began a new campaign. There was, he averred, 'proof that Kasturbai was unfaithful.' Mohandas flew to his wife; he flung before her the 'evidence' given by Mehta. He would not let her speak. He roared that 'it's impossible to doubt Mehta's veracity.' Under the law, Hindu women had no rights. A suspected servant could leave his employer, a son could break from his father, but, though a man could divorce his wife, she could not leave her husband. If he believed her unfaithful, she was ruined. It was, shouted Mohandas, his *right* to suspect his wife.

Kasturbai answered, characteristically, with candour and simplicity. She found courage to say that Mehta was not only harming herself, but corrupting Mohandas. Kasturbai's interference rankled bitterly in him.

When, after a time, Mehta proposed that they visit a brothel, Mohandas, despite his vows of fidelity, let himself be persuaded to go. Arriving at the house of prostitution, he learned that Mehta 'had arranged all, had paid for everything.' The fifteen-year-old youth stepped into a room arranged for him. He sat down beside a woman waiting there. He was unable to make a sound. The prostitute, angry and impatient, became abusive, raining curses on the lad; he wanted 'to sink into the ground,' feeling that his 'manhood was injured.' She showed him the door, and he slunk out. To himself he admitted the moral lapse: 'Carnal desire was there; that was as good as the act.' But God had protected him, and he 'had not betrayed his vow to Kasturbai.' He had not debased his love for her.

Somewhat later, he committed a petty theft to clear a debt of his brother's. Guilt weighed upon him. Only confession could ease his mind. Telling Dewan Gandhi, who was sick with a fistula, seemed impossible, except in a written list of sins, with request added 'for suitable punishment.' The old man took the note his boy handed him. When at last he had read through the entire sheet, he tore it into pieces, tears falling from his eyes. The boy

wept also. The old man, to whom sublime forgiveness was not – as with his saintly wife – a characteristic quality, gave his son full absolution. He told Mohandas that henceforward he might help his mother in such nursing care as the invalid required. Never would Mohandas forget this. Daily, he dressed his father's wound, gave the necessary medicine, and he even compounded drugs when they had to be made up at home. Each night he massaged the dewan's stiffened legs. The services were never neglected. Only when his father 'felt improved' or fell asleep, did the boy go outdoors, and then to bed.

Kasturbai, through her advancing pregnancy, matured. So also did her husband mature, into manhood, through contrition, confession, and absolution. Something beyond conflict with his wife filled his horizon at last. He was deeply ashamed that she was pregnant; he – a school-boy still – 'should have restrained himself,' he knew.

Yet, to his horror, he presently found that he could not curb his passion, despite Kasturbai's pregnancy. Religion, medicine, common sense, forbade sexual union now; he realized, appalled, that as he massaged his father's legs, his mind flew to the bedroom where Kasturbai was. His thought hovered over her there. He was eager to be done with his filial duty, that he might hurry to her, as soon as obeisance was made to his father.

Dewan Gandhi was progressively growing worse. The Ayurvedic – religious – doctors and the quacks, were alike of no avail. An English physician, finally invited, advised a simple operation, which 'would surely cure the fistula.' Native doctors said: 'God has willed otherwise.' Performing natural functions was now to the invalid an agony, but he would not disobey the Vaishnava rule of absolute cleanliness and insisted on continuing, insofar as he could, as if he were in full health.

Because kinspeople were expected to pay their respects to the dying, the dewan's favourite brother was at last sent for; the night through, he sat beside the sick man. Young Mohandas himself gave devoted care to his father, whose last days, it was only too plain, had come.

One night when his uncle offered to relieve the boy, as he was giving the dewan his customary massage, Mohandas quickly accepted; he ran straight to Kasturbai. Not five minutes later,

there was a knock on their door, and a servant called: 'Get up! Your father is very ill.'

Mohandas leaped from bed, crying, 'What is it? Tell me!' 'Father is no more.' said the servant.

Mohandas wrung his hands. Kasturbai waited in silence, as he flung on clothing. He raced to his father's room, ashamed and miserable. The shame was something he would never erase; when a middle-aged man, Mohandas Gandhi was to say: 'If animal passion had not blinded me, I should have been spared the torture of separation from Father during his last moments. I should have been massaging his legs, and he would have died in my arms.' It would then have been to himself that the dying father gave the last blessing.

The premier had a premonition of death, for he had made a sign for pen and paper, and he wrote: 'Prepare for last rites.' He had snapped off the amulet from his arms and the gold necklace of tulasi beads from his neck, throwing them aside. A moment later, he was dead. It had been in the arms of his beloved brother, not of his son, that he died. At the crucial moment of his father's passing from them, Mohandas had been 'sunk in carnal desire,' as he was to remind himself again and again.

It was not Kasturbai's fault. He could never accuse her of being 'the temptress.' He was 'a faithful husband, but a lustful one,' they both knew. He stood by now, as appointed persons bathed the dead man, covered the body, arranged the funeral rites. Hired mourners were gathered to weep and pray. Kasturbai, heavy with child, was ill with the shock. The widow moved stately and meek before the will of her gods. She donned the pale sari which must be worn until her life ceased.

The dead dewan's sons – Laxmidas, Karsandas, Mohandas – walked in the procession headed by bearers carrying the body under its blanket of flowers. Sons lighted a man's funeral pyre, repeated prayers for the dead. At last, the ashes were spread over the sacred river. Family and friends returned home. How bitter were the hours now for Mohandas and Kasturbai! She was not one to speak freely to him, not yet having thrown off her early constraint towards him.

Unexpectedly, there came the hour of her labour.

A tiny fifteen-year-old, she was taken to the small, airless

room, lonely and dark, which was set apart for births in the house. Hurriedly the midwife was summoned, to administer with clumsy unwashed hands such aid as she could give. In the confusion of unpreparedness, everything was done swiftly, to meet the danger in premature birth.

The cord was usually cut by some rough knife, often only a scythe. The infant's nose and anal opening and ears were cleansed with oil, to make them open and healthy. The child – after being tossed into the air to induce breathing – was given a bath in earth and oil, then clothed in an exquisite garment, long waiting and ready. Bells would then be rung to announce to all the community the coming of an infant. Gifts would be sent to celebrate the birth—for a boy (so devotedly hoped and prayed for), amulets, tinkling bells, wristlets. Kohl would be painted about his eyes, to keep away evil. His ears would be pierced to ward off wicked spirits. From the day when the umbilical cord was cut to the day when he received his 'Sacred Thread,' he would be close to his mother – the apple of her eye.

It was not in a woman's heart to do other than hope for a son, as she went through the dreadful hours of labour.

Kasturbai at last could fall back on her string cot and hear the whimper of her child. It was a pathetic mite, who lived only three days, this first fruit of her marriage with Mohandas Gandhi. No joyous bells rang; no happy songs were chanted; no loving gifts were sent. The tiny body was buried, and not burnt on a pyre, because it had existed so briefly. 'Nothing else could be expected,' Mohandas knew. 'Let all those who are married be warned by my example,' he was to say more than twenty-five years later.

What Kasturbai thought and said was not set down.

The time of defilement in giving birth was passed. The old quarrels were resumed in their apartment. Helpless desire for her enslaved the boy husband as before. Nevertheless, he managed to complete his schooling, as his father had wished. The dewan had left very little money; toward the end he had been living on only a state pension. It was decided that Mohandas had best take matriculation examinations at Ahmedabad, not in Bombay, where living was more costly and which was further from Rajkot.

The year was 1887. A Jubilee to celebrate ten years of

Victoria's reign as Empress was being held. Two years earlier there had been formed – at the suggestion of a British official – the India National Congress, to provide a means to reconcile hatreds and resentments among the leaders and peoples of the country. Mohandas Gandhi, except through his contact with Mehta, had small knowledge of or interest in the group desiring to throw off alien rule. He knew little of the plump old sovereign or of her greying, stout heir. For young Mohandas, the glory of a great Jubilee which was being held in honour of the monarch could not match the wonder of passing his college entrance examinations, or of his journey to Ahmedabad. It was the first time in his life that he had made a trip to a big city. And he went alone, besides.

He passed the examinations to Samaldas College in Bhavnagar, and entered its freshman class. At Rajkot, Kasturbai was pregnant a second time.

5

PUTLIBAI

PUTLIBAI HAD SET her heart on having Mohandas study law, and thereby make himself eligible to follow his father at the rajah's court. But at the end of his first college term, he came back home, because to understand lectures in English had been impossible.

An old Brahmin friend of the dewan's pointed out to the family that studying law would take four or five years, and at the end would fit the graduate only 'for a sixty-rupee post, not the dewanship.' He advised them to send the boy to England. 'In three years,' he said, 'he will return, and he can get the dewanship for the asking then.'

The cost would be high, perhaps four or five thousand rupees.

As with a roar of thunder, there came to Mohandas the thought of Kasturbai's jewellery. That would fetch four thousand rupees at least.

But she proved unenthusiastic about selling them. They were

her treasure. Laxmidas, the eldest Gandhi son, understood her. He offered 'to find the money.'

Another obstacle appeared, however. Putlibai heard that students abroad drank wine, ate meat and smoked tobacco. In her simple white garments, and with arms and feet no longer encircled by the bangles she had worn all the years of marriage, she seemed more stately and grave than ever, the personification of conscience. She asked: 'How about this? I am dazed,' she admitted, 'I do not know what to do.'

Rarely in memory had anyone from Rajkot gone to a foreign land. How could a youth be exposed to temptations which would ruin his soul? (Kasturbai had never revealed that Mohandas and Karsandas both had already sinned by eating meat.) Putlibai Gandhi was ready to have her son receive education from British teachers in a foreign university. But how was it possible to let him lose his soul? Yet, if he did not go abroad, he could never be prepared for the destiny she was certain he could attain.

Confusion and anxiety were not customary in Putlibai. She sought the advice of another friend of her husband's, a man who could understand, as she did, the religious difficulties looming before her. He had been originally a Modh Bania, like the Gandhis, but had become a Jain monk, member of the mystical self-denying priesthood, perhaps the most austere in all India. In her own character and manner of life Putlibai Gandhi followed much of their practice, insofar as a woman could.

The holy man when he came offered a suggestion to her: 'Let the boy solemnly take the Three Vows. Then he can be allowed to go.'

He himself administered the vows: 'Not to touch wine, or meat, or women, in the far land of England.'

Putlibai Gandhi could give her permission, now. At once, Laxmidas began gathering funds to pay for the years of study abroad. At the school a send-off was arranged for Mohandas; he had prepared a brief speech of thanks, but when he rose and tried to speak, he was wordless and trembling.

Laxmidas accompanied him to Bombay, but was unable to wait until the ship took off. Mohandas was informed that he must meet with their caste in Bombay, immediately.

He was afraid to go to the meeting. Only by drawing on all his

courage did he force himself to obey the command to appear before them, and then he was told sternly that no member of the Modh Banias had ever gone abroad. Should he sail, he would at once be declared outcast. Living abroad entailed eating at the same tables with Europeans – could he forget that the very shadow of an Unbeliever defiled a meal and the food was contaminated, so that it must be thrown out untasted? This was why their faith forbade crossing the seas.

He heard himself answer: ‘I intend going there for further study. I’ve already promised Mother to abstain from these things you fear. I am sure the vows will keep me safe.’ The pronouncement was made: ‘This boy shall be treated as outcast from today.’ Nobody would be permitted to see him sail. Kasturbai’s people – and his own – would never be permitted to break bread with him.

Twice before, however, the timid youth had taken a stand on issues which involved a principle. He had once refused to think of Uta, a faithful old pariah servant, as defiling one by the touch of a gnarled hand. He had later made friends, secretly, with an Untouchable boy. He was not ashamed of these things, and he now stood his ground.

Laxmidas had left passage costs for him with a kinsman; he would not give Mohandas the funds because of the caste interdict. Mohandas managed, however, to find someone who lent him the needed money. He even bought food and the clothes required for the journey – a short jacket which to him seemed highly immodest, a hideous tie, and white flannel trousers.

About his neck was the string of tulasi beads which his mother had placed there, with her prayer that it would protect him across the seas and in London later. He decided to have his scalp lock shaved, so that he would be less unlike the British.

Before he left, Kasturbai in Rajkot gave birth to a child. She lay under the ministrations of the heavy-handed midwife. A boy was brought forth; she had accomplished the supreme achievement of a wife—to give her husband’s family a male grandchild. They named him Harilal. Bells were rung, feasts were given, gifts were exchanged. Mohandas was the father of a son, perfect in every limb. For the first time – with thousands of miles of sea between them – there was to be peace for the eighteen-year-old husband and wife.

6

ANNIE BESANT

IN HER OBSCURE Kathiawar town, Putlibai Gandhi hoped with all her loving and believing heart that Mohandas would return eventually, bringing qualifications to fit him for the post of premier, formerly held by his father, grandfather and great-grandfather. For this, she had found courage to challenge religion, tradition.

Garbed in the widow's sari of white cotton, she continued at duties as mother of the house where now her eldest son, Laxmidas, had become as father of the family. She established a closer relationship with Kasturbai, comforting her – who was neither wife, maid nor widow – during the long months that passed. She taught her the art of fine homemaking and the obligations of a young mother toward a little son.

There were complicated matters to learn: for instance, at meals as many as twenty vegetables might be served to provide diversity, with spices and condiments to quicken the appetite. Plantain leaves were set out prettily, together with bowls of silver or brass for their common food. Little boys were taught to eat nicely, to use the right hand, never the left, when reaching into a bowl for their personal portions. Harilal must learn not to sneeze when prayers were said, either before eating or in the temple. He must be taken to successive rites, for blessings and to make offerings, as he grew into small boyhood. All this it was the duty of his mother to supervise.

Insofar as possible, Putlibai taught Kasturbai to see her life-task as Hindu mother as an ideal to be attained through dedication and by skills acquired for daily needs. But their differences remained, unalterable, since Kasturbai had been taught in her father's house that the first obligation of a woman was to be beautiful, desirable in her husband's eyes. Two pregnancies had not dimmed her beauty. Her tiny figure – reaching only to the shoulder of Mohandas, himself small

among their people – was perfectly made, faultless as a work of sculpture. Large eyes flashed in their frames of thick lashes, under curved brows. The folds of her sari fell with grace to slender ankles encircled by golden bangles ringing at every step. Many a Hindu might well have envied Mohandas his wife's beauty, simple direct dignity, native intelligence.

But she had not the remotest understanding of what her husband was experiencing in London. Putlibai Gandhi, also, despite her wisdom and the love she poured upon her son, was incapable of the faintest comprehension of his life there.

He was meeting young females who worked in shops and schools. He was learning of women accepted as leaders, even by men. Through a Miss Manning, who had taken the Indian cause as her own, he was also finding that he, though not of the British people, was acceptable in their homes as guest, even as friend. At a tea he was presented to the Political Agent from Porbandar. In India, the representatives of the Crown were overbearing and haughty; but in London this man struck up a kindly acquaintanceship with Mohandas.

The boy kept his Three Vows to the letter. When a fellow-Indian invited him to dine at a fashionable restaurant, Mohandas ordered only soup, and then enquired hesitantly of the waiter 'what was cooked in the soup.' His friend stalked out in disgust. Mohandas slunk after him, without touching the dish of which he was not certain. He was, in fact, hungry much of the time. Because the British apparently subsisted solely on flesh of animals, there were never enough vegetables to satisfy him at meals. Cheese and eggs were forbidden, as derived from animals. Then he discovered a 'vegetarian restaurant,' where to his astonishment he saw Englishmen who were as averse to killing beasts for food as was any Vaishnava.

Among the diners was Edwin Arnold, the writer, who became friendly with the diffident boy. Mohandas found courage to form a 'Vegetarian Society,' of which Arnold was a member. Young Gandhi was to his pride made secretary. (Though he was unable to muster courage to read his secretarial report aloud, the members did not laugh or mock.) This achievement could be written to Rajkot, to be read to everyone by Laxmidas. But how could they – for whom the very shadow of an Unbeliever

polluted all food in the house – understand that Mohandas was eating with Englishmen at the same table?

How could they have understood that he was speaking to, even strolling with, a fine English girl? At his lodging house the landlady had suggested that he walk occasionally with another guest of the place, a young Englishwoman. The walks became progressively more frequent and longer. Even to Mohandas it was plain the motherly old woman had matchmaking plans. He had noticed that Indian students frequently forgot to mention they were married men. He also at first was unable to say he was married, but finally he suddenly confessed this. Neither the landlady nor the English girl were angry. They remained his friends. Kasturbai in Rajkot could not be so much as addressed by her brothers-in-law, indeed by her own brother, unless she were hidden by curtain or screen. At home they simply could not have understood that in England it was possible for a man to be a woman's friend.

Fellow Indians urged that, if one would truly learn the English culture and way of life, it was necessary to adopt British dress and customs. Mohandas bought a tail coat, boiled shirt, silk hat. He took lessons in violin, in elocution, and even engaged a middle-aged woman to teach him dancing – though obliged to put an arm about her waist during lessons. Then conscience bore down on him. He dropped 'all that nonsense,' feeling – like the Bania he was – that he had been only losing time, as well as the money for which Laxmidas had gone so deeply in debt. He found a cheaper room, cooked his own meals, lived on thirty cents (about 2s.) a day to make up for his former extravagance, which he knew his mother would have considered only sinful self-indulgence at best.

He was doing well in his studies. The more he learned of English law, the more did he admire the British Constitution. During 1887, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of Victoria's reign, London was illuminated as never before. In Parliament, there were scintillating debates on the question of the hour, Irish Home Rule. Parnell, Gladstone, Randolph Churchill, Salisbury, Balfour, were making history. But Mohandas – as the autobiography he was later to write reveals – seemed aware only of what entered into his own life. History to him, who had been so solitary, so unhappy and self-distrustful, could as yet be only

what happened to himself. Nevertheless, in all London that Jubilee Year, there could have been not one among the subjects of the Empress of India who offered her deeper reverence for British law, than did the small brown-skinned boy from Rajkot, who had come to prepare himself to practice as barrister in the Empire's courts of justice. Victoria was a symbol, not merely an old, though royal female.

That year of 1887 he met a woman who changed his whole concept of her sex. Her name was Annie Besant. She defied law, religion, tradition, yet she was honoured, even revered. There were indeed few men who had her high status.

It was at a funeral that young Mohandas first saw her. With a number of other Indian students he had gone to pay last respects to Charles Bradlaugh, who had been a friend of India. He noted a woman standing at the edge of the waiting grave, swathed in deep mourning, a woman weeping as she threw a clod of earth upon the lowered coffin. The woman was Mrs. Besant. Mohandas Gandhi was never to forget the lovely Irishwoman, as countless others also could not, their lives through.

She was then in her early forties, but still in the flower of her beauty, with intellect and fearlessness to match. At fifteen she had read Ovid, Plato, the Iliad. At twenty, she married a clergyman; she left him because of a religious questioning she discovered in herself. He pursued her relentlessly for years, but, though mother of two children, she would not return. The year after leaving him, she met Charles Bradlaugh, editor, crusader, atheist, once member of Parliament, at a lecture he was giving on the likeness between Jesus and Krishna. She and Bradlaugh became close friends. He made her a regular contributor to his paper. Although it was not believed that they were lovers, she ruled him with her beauty and her brains. It was said that Bradlaugh could crush anyone in the path of his objectives; but he became her subject. Her deep eyes, silken skin, regular features, the heavy braids about a noble head, her voluptuous figure, gave her the name, 'an Irish Langtry.' George Bernard Shaw met her, fell in love with her, tried to make her one of his Fabian group.

With Bradlaugh she fought for endless causes, from women's right to rights of labour, from atheism to the freedom of India. On a charge of corrupting public morals they were both haled

to court, upon publication of a book on birth control. But they did not cease to write, lecture, and make war against whatever they considered injustice. Then Annie Besant fell in love with a talented, unscrupulous man, Aveling, who however presently deserted her, to live with the daughter of Karl Marx – Eleanor. Profoundly wounded, Annie Besant plunged into further crusades – fighting with passion for cause after cause.

Young Gandhi was to see her occasionally, though never to know her well, in the following years while a student. Countrymen of his crowded about her. Her name was part of the familiar vocabulary of Indian students in London. In 1888 she was arrested because of a sensational, bizarre demonstration. She was now working with another editor, a man of great brilliance and social zeal, W. T. Stead. With him she fought the cause of white slaves and of striking match girls in London.

During Gandhi's last year at college, Annie Besant met a countess, who came to London to give a series of lectures. She reviewed a book by this woman – Madam Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society. Annie Besant's whole life was changed by this meeting; the other woman was a Russian, and as strange, as dazzling and revolutionary as Mrs. Besant herself. Madam Blavatsky headed an international organization of perhaps one hundred thousand members, fanatically devoted to her. Annie Besant abandoned all that she had been interested in, to become the disciple of the aged Russian. When, in May, 1891, Madam Blavatsky died, it was known that Annie Besant would be her heiress as leader in a religious movement, the followers of which believed their head to possess divinity.

Indians attended many Theosophical meetings, since the organization's philosophy was a mixture of Hinduism and of concepts drawn from a number of other faiths. Gandhi attended a few meetings over which Annie Besant presided. 'The bride of Christ,' she came to believe herself. To Putlibai Gandhi and Kasturbai she could have seemed only a shameless creature, abandoned and wholly mad. But when Mohandas Gandhi was to live in South Africa later, there would be hung on his office wall the portrait of Annie Besant.

7

PUTLIBAI AND KASTURBAI

ON 18 JUNE, a month after Madam Blavatsky's death, Mohandas took his law examinations, passing with honour. Next day he was enrolled in the High Court; the day following he sailed for home. His three years in England were over. The strange people he had met and come to admire were to be left behind. He stopped in Paris for a day or so to see the Exposition there, but all he could remember later was how hideous was the Eiffel Tower.

He realized that he was terrified of returning home to mother, brothers, wife.

He knew that he had no practical training in Indian or Mohammedan law. How was he to earn a living at Rajkot? His mother had sent him away to prepare for the post of dewan. Laxmidas wrote that he would 'surely have a swinging practice.' In the days of his voyage, Mohandas remembered what had been written. He was numb with fear. His brother's expectations – based on great sacrifices made – and their mother's hopes of a great career to be won, were burdens that hung like stones about the young lawyer's slight shoulders.

There was expulsion from their caste also to face. How could one earn a living as outcast? And there was Kasturbai as well.

He would yet make good, he promised himself as he took the launch for Bombay.

The Arabian Sea in June and July was rough, but the storm welling in his heart was more frightening. How could he adjust to Rajkot, he who had come to admire English ways? The boy of eighteen – in dhoti and Kathiawar overjacket, with fine golden waistband and the richly folded turban of his caste – was returning in pressed trousers, shined shoes, stiff collar and tie. There must be 'certain reforms' inaugurated at home, he told himself. Kasturbai must be taught how to read and write, at least.

As he stepped ashore, he knew that above all he wanted to see his mother again. It was a stormy day, but Laxmidas was waiting for him. The brothers went first to the home of a noted Bombay citizen whom Mohandas had met in London. Then they proceeded homeward. Only now did the eldest brother break the news he carried. Their mother was dead.

She had died while her youngest son was still abroad. The dreadful news had been withheld from him, that he might not have the shock of hearing it in an alien land.

He had believed when his father died that no deeper hurt could come to him. This however was an even harsher tragedy. It seemed to him that he could not bear the pain. There was need of the customary ablutions. He checked his tears, did not yield to wild expression of grief. He knew that 'most of my cherished hopes are shattered.' He must stoically take to life 'as if nothing had happened to shatter it.' Even the breach with his caste was attended to: members were divided about readmitting him. The wise older brother, Laxmidas, had Mohandas bathe in the sacred river, then gave a propitiatory, penitential dinner to caste members. Mohandas, however distasteful he found this, yielded to the other's loving advice. He was taken back into the Modh Bania caste. They could go to Rajkot now.

Putlibai was gone forever. Only Kasturbai waited there.

Three years apart had not changed their relationship, it appeared immediately. 'It is not as I desire,' realized Mohandas. The woman he met was fitted neither by temperament nor by inclination to fill a mothering role to her husband. She remained totally ignorant, unable to comprehend the dignity of his profession; but on her part the immense chasm now dividing them intellectually seemed to her no larger than had been the difference between them as youngsters.

Nevertheless, her beauty held him as always. Quickly he became prey to his old jealousies. He admitted later that his squeamishness and suspicions made her miserable, as before. He tried to introduce a regime of instruction with her; as had invariably happened earlier, she was totally uninterested. And as always his desire for her came in the way. He admitted that educating her was impossible, teaching her was 'pure folly.' The division which had troubled and frightened him as a boy

was infinitely wider now. He must accept the fact that 'perfect unity' could never be attained between them.

However, she did not interfere in 'reforms' he wished instituted. Laxmidas already had told his wife to provide 'some sort of English atmosphere' by having crockery used not only on feast days, but at all meals. Mohandas added further innovations — cocoa and oatmeal porridge for breakfast. He wore his London dress faithfully. His small son Harilal must also profit by English customs, he declared. So also must the other children of the house. They must be made as hardy as British boys.

Kasturbai did not protest when her husband — his legs and arms thin as pencils — began instruction in daily calisthenics. He felt that he was succeeding with the children, 'more or less.' At any rate, he found a new joy in their companionship. With them he had no cause for anxiety about making good as barrister or over his obligation to earn a living.

But innovations in diet, clothing, household purchases increased costs heavily. It was necessary to ask: 'Where is the wherewithal to be found?'

As student, Mohandas, like his brothers, had been supported by the family. As *grahata* (householders) they each had the obligation of helping maintain the entire household. Laxmidas was a lawyer's clerk, Karsandas a minor official in the rajah's court. Mohandas, with his costly English law education, was expected to contribute the major portion of costs in the joint home.

He seemed unable to attract a single client.

He told himself, presently: 'Nobody is fool enough to retain one possessing hardly the knowledge of a good *vakil* (clerk) like Laxmidas, and yet expecting ten times the fee.' He was a total failure. Kasturbai with her beauty, her pride, could only have looked questioningly, at best pityingly, upon the man who plagued her with jealousies, ineffectiveness, with absurd insistence that he must teach her reading and writing.

Early in the year, she knew herself to be pregnant again.

Friends persuaded Mohandas to try his luck in Bombay, a large city. His fortune did not seem to change there. When finally a client engaged him, Gandhi rose in court but was unable to say a word. He ran out amidst the laughter that followed him. No other case appeared. Laxmidas himself was

troubled now. He asked the youngest brother to come back, to help in such legal work as was available; Mohandas was not bad at routine chores, mainly for poor clients. It seemed he would never earn more than a mere living, and that only with the aid of Laxmidas.

Laxmidas had his own anxieties. At Porbandar, where some of his work lay, the Political Agent – because Laxmidas Gandhi had given the rajah unwise advice – was furious with the lawyer's clerk. Laxmidas begged his brother to intercede. 'Only influence counts at Porbandar,' he pleaded, 'and you can clearly put in a good word for me with someone you know.' Most reluctantly, Mohandas at last consented.

On seeing Mohandas the official immediately recalled their friendship in London. But when he was told of the reason for this call he asked curtly: 'Surely you've not come to abuse our acquaintanceship, have you?' He barked out that Laxmidas Gandhi was 'an intriguer.' When Mohandas stammered some words of defence, the Crown's representative had a clerk throw the barrister out.

It seemed to Gandhi that he 'could not live with the insult.' He sent a furious note: 'You have insulted me. If you do not make amends, I shall have to proceed against you.' *Ahimsa* was no longer a word he knew. The reply he received reminded him, shortly, that he 'had made a nuisance of himself by insisting on remaining when asked to leave.' Rage and shame possessed Gandhi. English law would not permit this!

But friends advised him: 'Such things are the common experience of many *vakils* and *barristers*. You are still fresh from England and hot-blooded. Tear up the note. You'll gain nothing by proceeding against the *sahib* and may on the contrary ruin yourself.' There was a difference between meeting a British official on leave in London and meeting him in India. Bitter to swallow! Indian – inferior race!

The British Agent did not forget his anger. Practice in court proved henceforward to be almost impossible for Mohandas. And in October 1892 a second child, again a boy, was born to Kasturbai. Bells were rung, gifts given, as part of the prescribed festivities. But for Mohandas it meant there was another human being to feed and clothe in his part of the household.

Some peasants came to him, asking that he intercede with the

Administrator for reduction of the land-tax, which lay like a vast incubus over India. Part of every crop went as rent to the princes, part to officials of the Crown; the tillers of the earth lived enslaved by debt. Native rulers had no compassion: indeed their tax was based on tradition, therefore on religious duty. When Mohandas saw the Administrator finally, he found the native official as arrogant as any English representative. To plead for the farmers with the Political Agent directly was impossible. Again, the young lawyer was a failure.

Out of the sky, a letter arrived from Porbandar. Two Moslem partners there – old friends of the Gandhi family – had remembered the new attorney, struggling to make ends meet. They wrote that he could be of use to their lawyers in South Africa, where they had a case pending. His pay would be a hundred and five pounds, ‘with all found.’ Passage would be provided in first-class berths, both ways.

Where the dreams of a dewanship? Young Gandhi said sadly: ‘It is hardly going as a barrister, but as servant to the firm.’ Nonetheless, one hundred and five pounds could be given Laxmidas toward household costs. A new land, a new opportunity offered. What had he to lose?

A second time preparations were begun for departure to a distant country. There was not for him the ‘wrench of separation’ that he felt when four years ago he left for London. He asked the Moslems: ‘How long will I be gone?’ Possibly a year, no more, they gauged.

He told himself: ‘The attraction of South Africa makes the separation from my wife and sons bearable.’ Nevertheless he felt a pang, when he bade good-bye to Kasturbai. They had been married ten years, during which they had been together, at most, half of the time. When together, they quarrelled constantly. But she was the mother of his sons. Though her qualities were far indeed from the standards of women he had come to know and admire in England, he loved her; he was sailing with sorrow. He left her not merely as one for whom he had the habit of desire.

She was the only woman in his life now. His mother had not lived to see him sent to South Africa as a clerk. She had been spared the heartbreak of having him embark for a strange country, to perform small tasks, after all her high hopes, her sacrifices.

8

A WESLEYAN MOTHER AND KASTURBAI

THE CAPTAIN SHARED his own cabin with Gandhi, because the ship was crowded. They reached Durban, port of Natal, South Africa, late in April of 1893. From the deck Gandhi saw people waiting. It seemed to him somehow that the Indians there were 'not held in much respect.' When the Moslem lawyers with whom he was to work came forward, he noted they were 'treated with a sort of snobbishness' by others, and that 'stung' him. They stared at him, he realized, 'with a certain amount of curiosity' obviously inspired by his clothes.

A photograph of him taken at the time shows a young man striking in appearance, unlike the meagre little figure in London-made suit. He wore a frock coat as usual, but with it a turban in imitation of the Bengal pugree, as more fitting than a high hat to the South African climate. The turban's dramatic folds and shape diminished the large fleshy nose and hid his huge protruding ears, emphasizing instead the sensitive large mouth and pleading poetic eyes, which had depth, questioning, nobility. But he could see that the Natal lawyers were wondering whether his services would warrant the money paid him. They were totally unlettered, but held the high esteem of South African Indians. They did not disguise their doubts regarding the London-trained lawyer from Rajkot. The clients in their case were at Pretoria: what could the young man do there? Could his abilities or even his honesty be relied upon?

It was plain that they saw him only as a white elephant sent to them. Upon his very arrival Gandhi confronted failure, before beginning his work.

Next day, when he nervously followed them into the Natal court-house, he was ordered to remove his turban or leave the court. Indians whispered that Hindus did not wear turbans. These were permitted only to Moslems, who were considered

whites, and by the headdress were distinguished from Hindus, or 'coolie,' 'swami' Indians.

Mohandas left the court. He did not remove his turban. He sent off a letter to the newspaper, in protest against what had been experienced by him. There ensued a storm of controversy, with letters supporting him pouring in not only from Hindus but from Moslems, Parsees, Christians. Within a few days of landing he found himself, astonishingly, known all over Natal. Even the lawyers eyeing him disparagingly changed toward him, and when he suggested that their case — which had been dragging on for years — might be settled through arbitration in lieu of litigation, they received his proposal without rejecting it, though with reservations. He was given opportunity at least to try his plan. Less than a week after his arrival he was on his way to Pretoria, elated, proud.

At Maritzburg, where his coach stopped, there entered a man who stared at him, strode out, and returned with a workman who bawled: 'Come along. You must go to the van compartment — come along now!' When Gandhi tried to explain that he had a first-class ticket, he was tossed out on the platform. All night through, he sat in the empty waiting room alone, shivering in the icy mountain cold. He wanted to return to Rajkot at once, to admit himself a failure finally to Kasturbai. Something in him forbade it.

What had happened, he told himself, could be 'only the symptom of a disease,' the 'sickness of colour prejudice.' British justice would never condone it. Was it not a duty 'to root out this disease,' though 'hardship be suffered in the process?' At dawn—almost frozen but with spirit strangely at peace—he knew what he would do. He would *fight this local disease of colour prejudice*. It was as if he had passed through a profound religious experience during the lonely night. He had found a cause for which to work.

He telegraphed to the general manager of the railroad; that evening a berth awaited him as he had asked. But at Johannesburg, where he again changed coaches, the driver refused to let him occupy his first-class seat, forcing the young barrister to sit outside. Presently, when the man wanted a smoke, he threw a dirty rag beside his feet and ordered Gandhi to sit there. With trembling lips, Gandhi managed: 'I should have been accom-

modated inside. I put up with the insult. Now you desire me to sit at your feet. I will not do so. But I am prepared to sit inside.'

A huge workman was ordered to strike him, to drag him from the coach. Gandhi clung with frail hands to the coach-rail, telling himself with a curious wildness that even if his wrists were broken by the blows raining on them, he would not let himself be thrown from the coach. Other passengers – in pity and shame – protested at last. He was permitted to sit beside the driver again. Silently he endured the curses, the epithets flung at him until the journey's destination.

At the village where he was to take a coach to Johannesburg, Hindus told him one must accept and expect what he had experienced. 'It is part of earning a living in South Africa.' Gold had been discovered in Johannesburg about eight years ago. Before that Indian peasants – largely Untouchables – had been asked to come as labourers to South Africa. They were indentured for a period, then released as freemen. Instead of returning to the dreadful fate of pariahs in the motherland, they had remained – to work as barbers, tailors, waiters. Some had opened small shops. They worked hard, sacrificed, used their brains; many of them had prospered, some becoming owners of large stores, of factories, even of shipping companies. But gold made Johannesburg a boom town, its population quadrupling again and again, through immigration not only from Great Britain but from all the world. The new people were predominantly whites. Indentured labour from India was no longer needed; in fact Indians were not wanted. Every means was used to get them out of the country. No humiliation seemed too harsh to force them to leave. And this applied not to workmen alone, but to all, whatever their status.

One endured everything, however, because one must, in order to live, they told him.

Gandhi, however, could not assent. He wrote a message to the coach company, relating what had happened to him. His countrymen were incredulous when next day he received word that a good seat awaited him to Johannesburg. He reached the city safely. Nevertheless, when he tried to register at a hotel he was told that he could not be accommodated. The Hindu who gave him hospitality that night asked: 'Had you expected

admission to a hotel?" He urged the young man: 'Take a third-class passage to Pretoria, I beg you.'

'I will go first class,' said young Gandhi. To himself he added: 'English people think of us as timid, hesitant, incapable of risks. The average Englishman thinks that to an Indian looking beyond his own self-interest is impossible.' He must show that this was false.

He sent a third message. This went to the station master. He said that he was 'a barrister, accustomed to first class transportation and obliged to hurry to Pretoria,' that he 'would come to receive a reply in person' and 'expected a first class ticket.' Donning 'faultless English dress, to let them see how a coolie lawyer looks,' he went to the station, put down a sovereign on the counter, and asked for his ticket to 'Pretoria, Transvaal.' The station master, a Dutchman, handed him the ticket but added, 'I wash my hands of the consequences,' and then remarked: 'I can see you are a gentleman.'

In the coach a guard tried to put Gandhi out. He would not leave. Another passenger intervened, and the guard snapped: 'If you want to travel with a coolie, why should I care?' Another victory was won in the cause Gandhi had undertaken. But it was not the end, even so. At Pretoria, he was once more refused hotel accommodations, then given permission to register if he ate in his room. After a time the manager, troubled and ashamed, knocked and told the young lawyer that 'speaking to the other guests,' he had found 'they did not mind an Indian in the public dining hall.'

Gandhi decided to live with a Hindu family while in the city. But at the end of his first week in South Africa he was a different man. The boarding place he chose was the home of a baker, where he could have vegetarian meals. He ate with his host at the same table, romped with the children of the family, made himself thoroughly one of the household, all of which reflected the change within his thinking, of his very religious belief.

This year, 1893, Mrs. Besant, whom he had met in England, had come to India to make her permanent home in the sacred city of Benares. Although she had left her husband twenty years ago, because she found herself a freethinker, and had for years been excoriated in England for her radical views not only on social problems but on Christianity, she now abandoned her

atheism and as head of the Theosophical movement preached the ancient Hindu faith. She established in 1893 a school which she named the Central Hindu College, where she, although a female, was accepted, even in India, as administrative and spiritual head. The basis of her teaching there was unquestioning acceptance of Hinduism, which she believed was the 'heart's blood' of Mother India.

Mohandas Gandhi himself no longer felt that he could follow Hinduism without questioning. The faith his mother had taught him no longer was possible for him to hold. He must find what he 'really believed.' To his wife, even to his brothers, this in itself could have been only blasphemy.

Christians tried to convert him to their beliefs. A lawyer on the 'opposing team' had built for the South African General Mission a church where colour prejudice was not permitted. Gandhi was invited to attend services. Two gentle spinsters in the congregation gave him a standing invitation to tea. He met a fine Quaker named Coates. Gandhi came to love the gentle spirit of the old ladies; he admired the Christian lawyer. With Coates he shared long walks and talks on religion. But he knew that he 'could not accept Jesus as God's only son. If God must have sons, all men were His sons.' And he believed that 'redemption from consequences of sin is impossible; what is necessary is to be redeemed from the very thought of sin.'

He wrote to a wise man he knew in Bombay, concerning his religious search. He wrote also, however, to friends in London. The answer from Bombay was: 'No other religion has the subtle and profound thought of Hinduism, its vision and soul, its charity.' From London, a letter advised him to read *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, by Tolstoy. When he closed Tolstoy's book, Gandhi knew he had found the faith to live by – morality, service, truth. And these were built on *Ahimsa*, basic tenet of Putlibai's own religion.

One day Coates put out a hand and tried to break the necklace of tulasi beads which Putlibai Gandhi had placed about her son's neck when he left for England. The young barrister said swiftly: 'No. Do not touch it.'

'Surely,' asked Coates, puzzled, 'you do not believe in such things now?'

'I do not,' admitted the other. 'But my mother believed it

possessed magical attributes which mysteriously would shield me from harm. So long as the string does not break of its own accord, I would never break it. When of its own accord it breaks, I will not replace it. But this necklace cannot be broken.'

His answer was a figurative summary of his search for a religion.

On the basis of *Ahimsa* he worked through a solution to the case for which he was employed. Although only a minor assistant, he pressed his programme of arbitration instead of litigation. The matter was settled, with time, work and money saved.

He could go home. For the first time he could bring to Kasturbai success.

A farewell party was given in his honour. Costly gifts were presented by rich Indian merchants. He chanced to look at a newspaper, which had one squib headed ' Indian Franchise.' It referred to the bill before the legislature that would deprive Natal Indians of their right to help elect Legislative Assembly members. An old businessman remarked: ' Most of us are unlettered men, we only take the papers to find what happens in the stock market.' But young Gandhi said, ' If this bill is enacted into law, it will make our lot extremely difficult.' His use of the word ' our,' instead of ' your,' confirmed his sincerity. He added: ' It strikes at the root of our self-respect.'

A voice cried out: ' Stay one month more! We will fight as you direct us.' Others chimed in: ' Indeed, indeed. We must retain Gandhi.' His own shrewd Moslem law-chief cut in, ' What about his fee?' The young man said quickly that fees were out of the question, that if he stayed at all ' it would be only as a servant.' If they believed they ' could work with one another' and with him, he would postpone leaving for a month and work without payment. But a fund was necessary - for telegrams, travel and for counsel fees, since he was of course ignorant of local laws.

One old Moslem shouted: ' Money will come - Allah is good and merciful! Men will come, as many as you want and need!'

At once, Gandhi set a date for meeting. There came merchants, shipowners, indentured labourers, rich and poor, educated and illiterate, Christians, Hindus, Brahmins, pariahs, Parsees, Mohammedans - all, as the young lawyer said, ' children

of one motherland.' Although only the year before he had been incapable of pleading a case in the Small Causes at Bombay, he rose to speak and gave a simple, short talk. He said that telegrams must be sent, a petition must be signed. Discussion of the bill must be postponed two days. And all must be done in one night. Who would help? Men joined him in great tide. The bill must not be passed.

He worked with them until daybreak. A petition was written. Merchants, in their own or in hired carriages, went about obtaining signatures. Telegrams were then sent to the Speaker of the Assembly and also to the Premier of the Empress. Next day the newspapers carried warmly approving accounts of the petition. But the bill was passed, in spite of these efforts.

Gandhi said that a second, 'a monster petition,' must be drawn up. Only those who understood it fully would be asked to sign. He began reading everything he could find on Natal history, in relation to the bill. He wrote a passionately sincere statement based on abstract justice. In two weeks ten thousand signatures were obtained. Copies went to Ripon, Secretary of State for the Colonies, and to all the press. In India the leading newspaper came out strongly in support of Gandhi. In London the mighty *Times* approved his petition. In all probability, the Queen Empress and her heir, the Prince of Wales, had their attention drawn to *The Times* editorial and heard the name of Gandhi spoken.

Suddenly, it was a name internationally read. Even at Rajkot it could not have failed to be heard.

He found it necessary to write home what had befallen him, what had been laid upon him to do. He had a mission to carry through. He must help eradicate the local colour prejudice in South Africa. Returning to India was impossible for another year, he realized now.

Despite his shyness, the dissident lawyer found courage to tell South Africans that he had responsibilities at home. If 'the community could guarantee legal work to the extent of about three hundred pounds annually (about fifteen hundred dollars) it was possible to continue the public work.' Because he 'could not add to the credit of the community, unless living in a style suitable for barristers, there was needed also a home, which would be good, and in a good locality,' He would not permit the

fund for 'public work' to be more than three hundred pounds. 'It is enough,' he insisted, 'for I am not a white barrister. Nor can I be sure how I shall fare as lawyer. The work you give me may therefore prove valueless. You may be running a risk.'

But a suitable house was found for him. Leading Natal merchants would not let him refuse the furniture they provided, as substitute for the presents he now refused to retain since he was not returning to India. The Law Society balked at his petition for admittance to the Supreme Court of Natal, explaining that 'coloured people might outnumber the Europeans, who are responsible for Natal's development and must therefore predominate at the bar.' But he maintained his right to admission. And he won. The battle and victory made him even more widely known.

Cases came to him quickly. But his first obligation was to his mission. Since no one man could carry out the task, he formed the Natal Indian Congress, which became a legal organization in May 1894. It grew swiftly. A second group was also formed – the Indian Educational Association – from among the young men. In South Africa there was small opportunity for Indian youth to obtain an adequate education. This Association provided opportunity at least for debates, discussions, lectures and, as Gandhi himself added, 'airing of mutual grievances.'

A Wesleyan couple had often invited him to Sunday meals after their church services. He came to their house principally because of the joy he found in the small son of the family, with whom he played and talked while the mother prepared Sabbath dinner. She would herself come out now and then to tell the barrister, condescendingly, what he ought to know about religion, books, philosophy. He accepted it, with amused silence. But one day, when he spoke to her little son of the wrong in eating flesh of animals, he offended his hostess. He was asked not to return to the house.

He understood completely. Nevertheless, he was lonely without the child whose friendship he loved.

A photograph, very possibly taken to be sent to Kasturbai and their boys, showed him in London suit, high collar, derby hat. His face had the anxious look of one not wholly certain, not happy. He entertained in his charming house – set in a good neighbourhood and suitably furnished – not only Hindus but

Mohammedans, Parsees, even English friends. His way of living had changed as much as had his character, his professional stature. Though shy and diffident, he attracted men of many kinds and nationalities, who admired him and had become his friends. He was no longer the introverted boy.

Not only one year, but three, passed – and he was still in Natal. He was a rising lawyer; he had become an acknowledged leader among the Indian people. But he was lonely. He missed his wife and children profoundly. In 1896 he saw that he was still ‘in for a long stay.’ He wanted to go home at least for a six months’ stay, and bring back his family when he returned to Durban. If he went to India for a visit, he could do ‘some public work,’ he told himself, ‘by educating public opinion and creating interest in the Indians of South Africa.’ He would make the local problem here part of the concern of the motherland.

When he announced his intentions, gifts of appreciation as before were showered on him. He solemnly promised to return. The journey to Calcutta took twenty-four days; then a train must be taken to Bombay – and from there, another train was required to bring him to Rajkot at last.

The train to Bombay stopped for forty-five minutes at Allahabad and Gandhi decided to take a drive through the city. He missed the train. It meant an overnight stay. He dropped in, to fill time, at the offices of *The Pioneer*, which was edited by an Englishman named Chesney, who proved very sympathetic when told of what had been taking place in Natal and who promised ‘to give space to anything’ Gandhi would write. He added that naturally he was ‘in honour bound to give equal space to the Colonial viewpoint.’

Though Disraeli had been dead for fifteen years, his influence lingered. He had brushed aside colonial self-government as the basis of the British Empire. As the Premier had sonorously phrased it, India, South Africa, Australia, Canada, the West Indies were only parts of the ‘Imperial constellation.’ Gandhi had learned that ‘there could be no intrusion of disaffection from those opposed to the Colonials and the Crown’s officials in the Colonies.’ The lawyer did not wish to oppose the Crown. He sought only the justice of the British Constitution for Indians in Natal.

With the promise of Chesney to hearten him, he could

continue homeward in the knowledge that he had even the first day in India accomplished something of value in his 'public work.' The journey to Rajkot was short. As he sat in the train, his mind was not, as before, possessed with the desire to see Kasturbai. Something else filled his horizon. There should be written immediately 'a pamphlet on the situation in South Africa.' Chesney would 'take notice of it.'

Gandhi found his wife waiting in their apartment.

The man who greeted her was not the one who had bidden her good-bye. A rival she had not known entered between them. Henceforward she was to be, for him, second to his cause. Perhaps in no other direction was the change to be so marked in him, as in his relationship with Kasturbai from that day on.

She could feel no inferiority to the lawyer, the distinguished Natal leader; a woman, in her beauty, could not feel inferior to a man's mere professional and community status. But though he wanted her as wife again, he plunged into activities which had no relation to her, nor indeed to his responsibilities toward their children, their families. When there was news of a plague in Bombay he left her at once to offer help there. He did not ask to be placed on some honorary committee but volunteered to make a survey of sanitation in the city; and he went about looking at sewers, at dung-heaps, even in the section of the Untouchables.

Gandhi was never to forget the first time he saw the hovels of the poor. He was to remember the bits of torn rags, so old that they fell apart, spread as bedding by the pariahs on earthen floors, as sole shield against the cold. He knew that he would never again be able to feel a division between his own class -- the comfortable, the well-to-do -- and those who had nothing.

Then his sister, Ratiatbehn, sent word to him that her own husband had become ill; Gandhi returned to Rajkot with her and the sick man and their child. Kasturbai and the other women of their family could help the invalid and his wife and son. But the sick man died. Ratiatbehn and her boy would from now on be supported, as members of the Gandhi family. Kasturbai helped her sister-in-law in the sad duties of funeral rites, prayers, mourners to be hired.

But Gandhi announced that he was not remaining home for the funeral.

In Bombay he had lately met 'The Uncrowned King of the

Presidency,' the 'Lion of Bombay,' Sir Pherozeshah Mehta, of whom he had asked that there be arranged a public meeting in behalf of South Africa. The great man now wrote that such a meeting was possible; the date he set was the day of the funeral. Gandhi brushed aside fraternal duty. He went to Bombay.

While Kasturbai comforted the widow and gave consolation to the orphan, Gandhi had an interview in Poona with the leading spirit in the International Congress movement – Gokhale, the saint, and scholar and leader of his people. Gokhale closely questioned the diffident young lawyer, 'as a schoolmaster would a candidate for admittance to school,' Gandhi told himself nervously. But he passed the examination, and he accepted Gokhale as his political 'guru' (ideal).

The meeting arranged, Gokhale now read the paper Gandhi was to present there, criticized its form and advised on how to deliver its content. Later, his pupil congratulated himself, almost wonderingly: 'It was heard by all.' At the meeting too were sold copies of a 'green pamphlet' which he had written as soon as he returned to Rajkot to present the South African situation; ten thousand copies had been printed, for distribution among newspapers and editors of the English-speaking circulation. The pamphlet had evoked considerable comment from the press. The audience that heard Gandhi snatched the small booklet 'like hotcakes,' to his wondering gratification. He had made the story of Natal known to his people in the homeland now.

Instead of going home, he saw editors to make certain that the South African issue was considered by his own country's press. Not until he had visited office after office did he take the train to Rajkot.

Kasturbai was pregnant, but there were matters which repeatedly took Gandhi from home and her. Then a cable from Durban begged him to come immediately. Passage would be provided for him and his family, even for his widowed sister's son. Kasturbai was confronted with preparations for a journey to another continent. She who had never been farther away than Porbandar, her birthplace, would have her next child born among strangers, in a country thousands of miles from home.

Her husband moreover suddenly announced that only by looking and acting like the Europeans would it be possible to

enjoy their respect; she must therefore put on a British gown, corsets, bustle, high lace collar, laced shoes; she must wear her hair in towering curls. And their boys must have jackets, trousers, heavy shoes and stockings, starched collars and Eton ties.

Kasturbai, who had never worn shoes in her life, who had never known any garment other than her sari and blouse, wept aloud. But Gandhi had changed. He was another man since his stay in South Africa. He told Kasturbai her tears would not avail her. She would come to Natal looking like the wives of Englishmen and Dutchmen there.

Even to him, however, it was evident, after the first flush of anger with her, that a provincial lady from Rajkot – pregnant, besides – could not be made to seem a lady from London, or even from Johannesburg. How disguise her, so that she might ‘approximate the European standard as far as possible’? he asked himself. It came to him, by inspiration. The Parsees were ‘regarded as the most civilized among the Indians, in South African society,’ and so it was as a Parsee lady that Kasturbai must appear. Her protests did not count. She was obliged to don the Parsee sari and wear shoes.

There was a steeliness in Gandhi which she had never known. He meant to have his way.

Harilal and little Manilal and their cousin wept that their shoes hurt, that the stockings bruised their feet. They bawled when put into jackets. But they did as they were told. Luggage filled with the new clothes went to their ship – one of a pair of vessels owned by a Natal Indian, that were sailing together. Tearfully, Kasturbai bade friends and kin at Rajkot good-bye. She could find a slight comfort in the fact that a number of relatives were coming along to South Africa, to make their fortunes. But among these was the old-time evil friend of Mohandas, the glib Mehta.

Half the passengers seemed to be Untouchables. Gandhi’s family were the only cabin passengers. No sooner did the ship move forward than Gandhi began to mingle with those on all decks. Kasturbai, sick with pregnancy and burdened with three boys, miserable in her new garments, and on her first voyage at sea, had enough to occupy her. It was the monsoon season, besides, with frequent storms to make her even more wretched.

There rose a storm so violent that Hindus, Moslems, Parsees, even the Christian passengers, prayed together in common terror. Huge spars fell as the ship rocked and rolled. The storm lasted twenty-four hours. Gandhi was the sole passenger who did not become ill. Fortunately, however, the trip took only eighteen days. They reached Natal on 18 December, but were told they must remain aboard for a quarantine period, because they had sailed from Bombay where the bubonic plague raged. They arrived 13 January, 1897.

Unknown to his wife, Gandhi heard from friends that he was in grave danger. White residents at Natal were seething, monster meetings were being held. The steamship owners were being besieged to return all passengers on both ships to India at once. It was believed that Gandhi had arranged for hundreds of Untouchables to come on the ships in order to swamp South Africa with Indian workers, although he had had nothing to do with such a plan, not even knowing who the passengers were when they embarked.

Notice came, finally, after twenty-three days, that passengers could land. Gandhi was warned that his life nevertheless was threatened. He and his family must land at dusk. He refused to enter Durban as a thief in the night, but he agreed that Kasturbai and the boys should be driven to the home of a leading Indian, while he himself followed afoot.

Questioning, bewildered, Kasturbai found herself bundled up and hurried to a carriage; the boys were placed with her. They were whisked away to safety. Without her husband to encourage and protect her, she entered South Africa — she who had never been outside purdah was raced through dark streets, lest she be recognized and harmed, for reasons which she did not know and could not have understood.

She was brought to the house where she must wait for her husband. He did not come. Not until two days later did she see him. He was battered, bruised, and bloody. He had been all but killed by a mob, pelted with rotten eggs, stones and bricks. Only because of the intervention of a fearless woman — the police superintendent's wife, who swept open her parasol and kept the hoodlums at bay — was he saved. But he had been left lying unconscious on the street beside her. Even then, prompt measures had been necessary to prevent his murder by the mob,

which returned presently. A disguise of sorts was improvised for him. Two detectives stole with him to a side street. More dead than alive, he was hurried to the police station. Not until two days later was he able to speak to interviewers, but he had refused to make charges against his assailants.

He still refused to do so. So incredulous were the authorities, that he was obliged to put his refusal in writing.

From London the Secretary of the State for the Colonies – Joseph Chamberlain – cabled that the leaders of the mob must be punished. Gandhi still refused to identify them.

White residents were overwhelmed by the disgraceful near-lynching. But Gandhi knew it was 'a blessing for me – that is, for the cause.' The franchise bill was altered, and suffrage was granted to 'free Indians,' although two new discriminatory bills had been introduced, that Gandhi would try to defeat.

With reason, Gandhi could participate in the celebration of Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. His name was honoured through all Natal and Transvaal. He received an accolade from one of the great figures of the times – a woman even more famous than Annie Besant – the internationally famous writer, Olive Schreiner, who paid him tribute as a noble person, a hero and a crusader.

But his wife had no reasons for happiness in the new land to which her husband had brought her. A portrait done at the time speaks eloquently for her. Dark hair, parted as in Greek sculptures, was gathered into a huge velvety knot at the back. A fine oval face was still perfect in outline, although she was all but thirty. Immense dark eyes shone splendidly in the small face with its classic nose and beautiful mouth. The forehead was not low; the chin was perhaps too firm. A bodice of sheer fabric revealed the curve of well-formed bosom and shoulder. A sari of delicate silk was wound about the body and tossed over her right shoulder. Head and temples were covered, as required for a Parsee lady when out of her home. On the feet were shoes. They could not have hurt the less, because they were fashionable and well made. On her face pride and doubt mingled. In the large eyes was withdrawal, secrecy; what she felt, she would not permit the camera to reveal.

But she felt a profound unhappiness, in her new house in Durban.

9

OLIVE SCHREINER

KASTURBAI, after fifteen years, was in her own home at last, no longer under authority of another woman. But Durban was crowded with English and Dutch, Moslems and Parsees; in the streets rickshaws were rushed past by Zulus or Basutos, whose heads bore decorative horns and feathers. All was strange, frightening to the small-town woman. She was, besides, very ill, as her pregnancy advanced, and finding a Hindu woman as nurse seemed almost impossible in Natal. When her baby came, a third boy, the birth left her wholly depleted, suffering from serious anaemia.

Yet Gandhi bore down on her incessantly, ordering that Parsee dress must always be worn, that the boys must not fail to wear their English clothing, that food must be taken with forks and knives and never with the fingers. The boys must attend a European school, he announced. When it proved that Indian children were not acceptable in the 'white' classes, he refused to send his as 'exception and special favour.' The mission school he considered 'inadequate, owing to language deficiencies.' Kasturbai must have the youngsters ready daily for a period of instruction their father would himself give.

After a brief experimental interlude he declared himself too busy to continue teaching them; an English governess would be hired. To Kasturbai's dismay, a female Unbeliever was introduced in her home. Gandhi seemed bent on showing his authority. A leper knocking on their door was invited to remain, Gandhi himself nursing the poor creature. One evening, returning from Pretoria - in the Transvaal, where he had some of his clients - Gandhi reported that he had been refused a haircut by the white barber there. Henceforth, he would cut his own hair. Next, he bought a book on laundering and proclaimed that he would do his own collars and shirts. Kasturbai must 'acquire self-help' with him, and aid in this chore. The

washerman was discharged, and Kasturbai—a high-caste Hindu—began to perform a task forbidden to her class, since as wife she could not disobey a husband's whim, however preposterous.

His law practice brought in an impressive income. But the cases, usually settled by arbitration, entailed 'chamber work' almost exclusively, so that he missed the warmth of human drama. His 'public work' for the Natal Indians consisted largely of meetings and of writing pamphlets and press releases. His time was full. But there was a restlessness in him which he seemed unable to calm. Quarrels with his wife did not end. He denied her the right and dignity of managing her household, thwarted her plans for the children. One day, he declared that all furnishings must be 'simplified'; there were 'too many ornaments.' Next, he decided that 'simplification must extend' to her jewellery. When she wept and protested against disposition of her personal jewels, her bridal gift from Nakanji himself, Gandhi retorted that he was 'cruel—only to be kind' to her. He must make her 'an ideal wife.' Some of her cherished jewels were sold.

In his heart he knew that 'the home failed to hold' him. He believed that he 'wanted some humanitarian task, of a permanent nature.' When the leper in the house became too difficult to nurse, Gandhi was obliged to take him to the Government Hospital for Untouchables. He himself enrolled there for a nursing course, and then volunteered a few hours weekly in service to the sick. A sort of peace came to him thereby. But his carping and criticism did not end for Kasturbai. What he desired was to make her share his thinking, his concepts of life. At Durban and Johannesburg both, he had European friends whose wives were women of intelligence and social vision. Like their husbands, they received him, although an Indian, as welcome guest in their homes.

Among the women who became his friends was the world-famous writer, Olive Schreiner. Her brother Will Schreiner was Attorney General of Transvaal during Cecil Rhodes' second ministry.

Born in South Africa of English missionary parents, she was perhaps forty years old at the time of her meeting with Gandhi. Publication of her first book, *The Story of an African Farm*, while she was still in her 'teens, made her known to the leading minds

of London, where she had courageously brought her manuscript, though she was almost without funds. She met Havelock Ellis. They fell in love. From her combination of Scottish, English, and Jewish ancestors, she had a vivid dark beauty, with large eyes, wonderfully rich mouth, short voluptuous figure. The slight, sexually timid Englishman eventually married a less exotic girl, who later was to reveal herself a homosexual, and to die insane.

Returning alone to Kimberly, Miss Schreiner met a man on board ship – Cecil Rhodes, who was profoundly attracted to her and with whom she thought she ‘could almost fall in love.’ But when she was placed next to him at dinner one evening in Johannesburg, it troubled her to have Rhodes say: ‘I prefer men – to niggers.’ He said, on another occasion: ‘Every man has his price, I believe.’ She came to hate him for his materialism and ruthlessness.

Although she quickly attained world renown as writer, in her country she received disdain, even dislike, for open champion-ship of the Negro and the Indian. A young man, Samuel C. Cronwright, after a dinner party they attended, sent her a note and to a question he asked, she replied: ‘For me, the real Question in South Africa is the Native Question.’ Cronwright, eight years her junior, tall, bearded, who, as he said, ‘lived months at a time in the saddle,’ fell under her spell. To him Olive Schreiner, though rather fat by then and suffering from chronic asthma, seemed ‘a radiant child . . . a creature of wonder.’ Her head was still splendid and beautiful. When they were married in 1894, ‘Oom Paul’ – President Kruger – offered the distinguished South African author an annuity of three hundred pounds. On learning that it would come from funds of the jingoistic Secret Service Committee, she turned the offer down, and went with Cronwright to an eleven hundred acre estate he managed, a place ineffably lovely with its tropical vegetation, bright birds, and wild forest beasts. Her baby was born in 1895, but lived only sixteen hours. The Cronwrights moved to Johannesburg. Their home at once became the centre of culture for writers and artists, and a place of warm hospitality toward those interested in national and international issues as well.

Men as different as Rudyard Kipling and a Kaffir editor,

Will Schreiner and Mohandas Gandhi, Zulu chiefs and Christian missionaries, were received. In 1895 came the Jamison Raid; Olive Schreiner was certain that Smuts, whom she knew, 'had surely instigated this.' She could no longer think of herself solely as artist. A task was laid upon her, and the writing she did must be in its behalf. The task was to speak for her country, and to speak to her country for the Indian and the Negro. In 1897 when she went to England to arrange publication of *Trooper Peter Halket*, she wrote sharply to a newspaperwoman asking for an interview:

Instead of . . . describing how the Duchess of so and so furnished her house . . . and how such and such an authoress talks and plays golf . . . would it not be better to give one whole year . . . to writing on, say, the duties of a dominant race such as the English . . . to the weaker of subject races in India, South Africa, and elsewhere?

The following year Will Schreiner became prime minister of Transvaal. But her home remained as before. She and her husband (who had added her name, Schreiner, on their marriage) lived with utmost simplicity, doing their own cooking and housework.

Mohandas Gandhi had formed the Natal Indian Congress the year when Olive Schreiner married. His work for his countrymen had as yet brought small results. But, curiously, the British themselves were protesting that they, who comprised the major population in South Africa since the gold rush, were discriminated against by the Dutch – in heavy taxes, injustice before the courts and in business. Olive Schreiner was on the side of her countrymen, as she revealed in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian*. Gandhi, however, did not follow her direction. Although she was for him not merely a distinguished name – as was Mrs. Besant, the other eminent European woman he knew – he had never wavered in loyalty to the Crown, in his certainty that British justice was beyond reproach.

In 1898, moreover, he had grave personal anxieties to occupy his thought. He had taken his wife and children for a short visit to India. When they returned, Kasturbai was with child once more. She was seriously ill, month after month. This time, said Gandhi, he would shield her from the ministrations of clumsy midwives and untrained nurses. He would himself take care of

the delivery. Was he not permitted by the hospital to look after indentured labourers, whose very languages – Tamil, Tegulu – he could not understand? He bought a book, *Advice to a Young Father*. In the midst of study of the book, war was declared between Britain and the Boers.

Immediately Gandhi offered his services in recruiting a nursing unit. The offer first was rejected, then reconsidered and accepted. Permission was given to form ‘a coloured unit’ which would face death on the front lines. Gandhi pleaded with his countrymen to ‘prove Indians are not weak,’ that they ‘have manly courage.’ Deeper understanding and a true friendship would result when peace returned. Kasturbai was left alone, while he led his men to the battle front. He was gone six weeks. Peace was restored, and he came home. Many of his men had been wounded; many had died. He and others in his corps were decorated for ‘great valour.’ Natal newspapers said: ‘We are sons of the Empire, after all.’ But conditions did not change for South African Indians.

They were not slow in revealing their own bitter disillusionment with Gandhi. When he asked their help in eradicating Durban slums, as places breeding disease, he was answered with indifference and even mockery. He had become a crank, a failure, among his people.

Disillusionment enveloped him also.

Even his obsessive love for Kasturbai seemed to him at times no more than a burden. There entered his mind a curious wish, to be free of desire for her. He first told himself: ‘It would at least prevent her illness at childbirth.’ But what he knew, within himself, was that he sought beyond these two objectives one other – to find peace in himself. If he could attain the stage where he had no further need of her physically, he would have that peace, he believed.

He tried to live apart from her, briefly. It was impossible, he found.

Although she was a woman unable even to write her name, a woman who did not remotely understand such leaders as Mrs. Besant and Mrs. Schreiner – his two ideals – he loved her. A picture of him and his wife, taken at the time, shows him in frock coat, with moustache adorning his face. He looks tense and secretive. She sits in sari and dark blouse, hands folded on her

lap. Her face is very lovely and it is clear that she was secure in the knowledge of her beauty.

He was, like other veterans, trying to find what he thought, wanted, believed. He had set aside his own sympathies for the Boers, because he believed there was no justice truer and nobler than that of the British Constitution. He had taken the side opposed by his friend Olive Schreiner, because he knew that in the law of the Empire was provided a grandeur which no other nation offered. For him, this was the strength of the Empire and the summit of his professional ideal.

Amid conflicts in nations vast distances apart, Victoria's people celebrated the victory in South Africa. She received adulation and even love. A new century opened. But on 21 January, 1901, she died, and her son Albert was proclaimed King and Emperor. His son and two little grandsons – David and 'Bertie' – would become the symbols, in their turn, of the domain Disraeli had brought into reality.

To Kasturbai there was no meaning in the names of a new king, nor of his children. Her time was near.

Labour came one day, unexpectedly. Had it not been for her husband's study of his little book, she would not have survived. He did all that was necessary. He declared that he was 'not in the least nervous,' but admitted that 'her agony put me to the severest test.' It was the first time he had seen her in labour. He would never forget what he witnessed. He told her solemnly that this would be their last child, adding: 'It is the height of ignorance to believe the sexual act is an independent function, necessary like eating and sleeping.' If that were realized, he felt, 'none would have sexual union for fulfilment of their lust, but only when they desire issue.' He desired no more issue.

A woman was engaged to look after Kasturbai's needs; she remained very ill. He acquired still another book, however, on the care of babies. The fourth child – another boy, whom he named Devadas – was bathed and fed by its father, as a duty undertaken, despite demands of business, the community, hospital work. Manilal, the second boy, caught smallpox, and Gandhi nursed the lad to health. He tried another period of continence with Kasturbai; he failed to maintain it.

Suddenly he announced to his friends: 'My practice is so successful that I fear my main business has become making

money.' He meant to leave for India, he added, where he 'could be of service' to his people, whereas here his mission was ended, for 'others can carry on what has been begun here.' His friends pleaded that he reconsider; he refused, but promised finally to come back if ever they needed him. A farewell dinner and costly gifts were given him. There was a necklace set with diamonds for Kasturbai.

That night he paced to and fro, asking himself whether he could keep the gifts, when he had undertaken the community work 'without remuneration.' To return the gifts worth thousands of guineas was difficult, he knew, but he knew also 'it is more difficult to keep them.' What sort of example would he set if he kept them? He had been exhorting others to 'conquer infatuation for ornaments'; he had nagged Kasturbai into disposing of most of her own.

He must decline the gifts now.

First, he called his two elder boys. With all his charm he presented the issue to them. Harilal was thirteen, Manilal almost nine. The barrister, skilled in arbitration, found it easy to persuade his sons. Harilal said: 'If I would ever want jewellery, I'll work – and buy it.' This was 'self help.'

But when Kasturbai was informed of the boys' reaction, she wailed: 'Cajoled, they dance to *your* tune, Mohana! What of my daughters-in-law? They'll be sure to need my jewellery. Who will know what may happen tomorrow?' She would *not* return her necklace. Their youngsters, Gandhi reminded her, had yet to be married. Surely she would not want for them brides too fond of ornaments? 'If, after all,' he said, 'we need to provide them ornaments, I am there and you will ask me.'

'Ask *you*?' she retorted. 'You deprived me of *my* ornaments! You would not leave me in peace with them. No,' she cried out, 'the necklace will not be returned! Is it not given to me?'

As if speaking to a child, he asked in his turn: 'Is it given you for your services or for mine?' She must understand this crucial point, he knew.

She agreed, in tears, that it was given for his services, but insisted that 'services rendered by you are as good as services by *me*.' She sobbed: 'I've toiled and moiled for you day and night. And is that not service? You forced me to weep bitter tears and

I slaved for you!' He admitted silently that these were 'pointed thrusts,' that some 'went home.' But the gifts must go back.

They were returned and with them others given him when he left in 1896 also. At his suggestion they were all 'deposited in a bank to be applied for work benefiting the community.' Now he and his family could sail for home. His task in South Africa was finally done.

At Bombay, Gandhi again saw Gokhale, who heard sympathetically the lawyer's request that a resolution be presented in protest against wrongs suffered by their countrymen in Natal. The resolution was read before the India National Congress by Gandhi himself, and was passed with Gokhale's aid. Why, asked the old scholar, should not the young barrister settle in Bombay? The city had a large group interested in their country's cause. But the lawyer, despite his successful practice in South Africa, found himself 'overwhelmed by unpleasant memories of failure' and knew he had not the courage to stay. He 'hated the prospect of practice in Rajkot,' he despised the 'need of sharing fees with *vakils* in order to get clients,' but he must return to the small home town.

Kasturbai herself was overjoyed to be once more with the family and to take part in its familiar, beloved routine. But her husband's practice brought no more than an occasional small fee. The old man who had long ago urged him to study law in London insisted that he move to Bombay. 'You're buried in Rajkot,' he scolded.

'You'll find me work if I go?' queried Gandhi, with irony.

'Yes,' was the answer. 'And we'll bring you back here as a big lawyer from Bombay to take cases in Rajkot courts. When would you leave?'

'Why not at once?' was the reply. Kasturbai, hardly settled with the family, was taken to Bombay.

Gandhi's practice prospered there. He later took a charming house at Santa Cruz, buying a first-class ticket to Churchgate, and often being – as he naively told himself with pride – 'the only first class passenger in the compartment.' Gokhale dropped in upon him once or twice weekly, usually bringing to the lawyer's office a friend to whom he introduced Gandhi; he did not disguise the fact that he had great plans for the young man who had fought for their people in South Africa. Kasturbai

herself found friends and kinspeople hospitable in this Indian city. Bombay – one of the world's metropolises – had a population of three quarters of a million, busy railway centres, cotton factories, businesses unrivalled over all the country, bazaars famous for their unmatched craftsmanship in jewels, woods, textiles. On Malabar Hill native princes and millionaires competed with Europeans in their exquisite mansions and gardens. Kasturbai, although following the closed life of purdah, knew herself back home, and in a Hindu environment which had splendour and ancient glory in its many temples, to which a pious woman was not only permitted attendance but was indeed expected to make frequent pilgrimages.

Durban must have seemed a dreadful dream to her.

Then, suddenly, word came that Gandhi must return to Natal. Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the Colonies, had arrived. There was opportunity to present Indian grievances to the Crown's representative. Gandhi had promised to come back if needed. He sent a cable to say he was sailing at once.

His new task would take a year, he gauged. Kasturbai would remain in Bombay; the boys could thus continue at their good school. But he remembered that most of Kasturbai's jewellery had been sold. Should something happen to him, 'there would fall on Laxmidas the duty of supporting her and the boys.' An American insurance agent had for some time been calling on Gandhi, exhorting him 'like a father, to take a life insurance policy, which is held as a religious duty in the United States.' The man had 'an agreeable manner and speech,' Gandhi had told himself, amused. Now, he had him draw up a policy for ten thousand rupees; Kasturbai would be shielded against whatever the future might bring.

When he bade his wife and sons good-bye, Gandhi said to himself: 'There are only wife and children now. Leaving them is for the moment only painful.' He had 'inured himself to an uncertain life,' he hoped. But he felt a pang as his ship sailed from Bombay. It seemed a long journey, this time, back to Durban again.

Natal was reached not an hour too soon. Chamberlain, it proved, was in South Africa to gather thirty-five million pounds for repair of war ravages. It was necessary to compose a

'memorial' as quickly as possible; a deputation must be named to carry the memorial to Chamberlain before he left. The Secretary, however, refused to do more than receive the deputation; he was in haste to leave, obviously intent on not offending the Boers by listening to Indian grievances.

Gandhi told his countrymen that he would make plans to see Chamberlain in Transvaal. Transvaal, reduced to a shambles by war, required permits for entry and departure. Europeans easily obtained these, but Indians paid large bribes, often up to hundreds of pounds. Gandhi, however, received his permit quickly from the police superintendent, who was an old friend. When he reached the Transvaal border, he was asked suspiciously how he had got his permit. His explanation was tossed aside, and he was ordered out of the country.

From Gokhale he had heard that 'colour prejudice' existed in other places; but he was certain that the tragedy of prejudice stemmed from petty officials who were not adequate to perform duties entrusted them by the Crown. He stifled his rage. Nevertheless, it was galling to have his countrymen jeer: 'At your instance, we helped the British in the Boer War, and you see the results!' He managed to reply: 'We did no more than our duty.' To himself he said that 'the facts of Mr. Chamberlain's refusing to see us and of the British official insulting me are nothing before the humiliation of the whole community.' He was only the small symbol of a people.

His job must be in Transvaal from now on. He must establish a home, begin his practice anew in Johannesburg. Olive Schreiner and her husband were his friends, and he made others quickly, as usual. In a vegetarian restaurant he found a London Jewish newspaperman, Polak, employed on a local paper; Polak took him to meetings of 'The Seekers' Club,' which met regularly for study of the *Gita*. Gandhi met another man, Herman Kallenbach, millionaire German Jew, successful businessman, yet a scholar and a visionary.

Studying the Hindu *Gita*, Gandhi began to memorize it while shaving in the morning. He found new meaning in the ancient, familiar words. *Aparigraha* – nonpossession – would that mean destroying one's books? *Samabhava* – equability – would that mean treating *everyone* alike, corrupt and insulting officials, co-workers who yesterday were loyal and today raised meaningless

opposition? What of those still loyal – were they to be treated no better than the others? The *Gita* said that a man desiring salvation must consider himself no more than a trustee of his possessions: did not this mean he must regard all he owned ‘not an iota his own?’ Gandhi told himself: ‘I could not follow him . . . unless I gave up all . . .’

He happened to see in the *Manchester Guardian* a piece about the ‘No Breakfast Association,’ which enjoined a spare diet because ‘food inflamed the appetites.’ Although a small man, Gandhi ate prodigiously. He would eat less, he decided. When he brought his wife to their next home, he would have her prepare fewer rich dishes, and use less spices and condiments. It occurred to him that there could well be published a magazine setting forth his views on religion, diet, nursing, and the rights of his people. He decided to go to Durban, to examine the possibility of printing such a periodical. Polak, who was interested in the idea, brought him a book to read on the train.

The book was John Ruskin’s *Unto This Last*. Not until he had completed reading the final page did Gandhi put the book down. He knew that he had found a way of life. Tolstoy’s book had revealed an ideal to him; Ruskin’s showed how to make the ideal a day-by-day reality. Tolstoy taught brotherly love among all men. Ruskin said, men should live by the work of their hands. A vision formed in Gandhi’s mind. If he bought a farm he could establish a community of those dedicated to living by work of their hands. He could publish the magazine at the farm. The members of his colony would help with that task too.

With Polak, he found a place near Durban that was suitable for a colony, paying a thousand pounds for the property. A printing press was next acquired. Polak resigned from his newspaper job, to prepare the ground for publication of the new periodical; its name would be, Gandhi decided, *Indian Opinion*. The printing press was to be kept at the farm; Polak would begin printing issues as soon as there were enough members to make the beginning of a communal family.

People in Durban were not loath to express the opinion that the new programme was certain to fail, that it was sheer ‘foolishness.’ Nonetheless, members began drifting in. At first they believed they could build houses of brick; this was found to be more costly than most could manage, and huts of corrugated

iron were erected instead. English, Dutch, Hindus, Moslems, Christians came. Maganlal Gandhi, the favourite cousin of Mohandas, came to take charge of clearing the ground of grass and snakes and to oversee the building of shacks for members. The year was 1904.

Gandhi himself hoped 'gradually to retire from business.' He would become one of the colony members. He would seek salvation – one day – through relinquishment of all wordly possessions. 'Phoenix Farm' was the name he gave his new colony.

Sometimes a certain question struck at him, hauntingly, insistently: 'To attain salvation, should a man give up even the dearest of possessions, his intimate love with his wife?' He knew he could not answer this. He knew, indeed, that he missed Kasturbai, that he hungered for her. Among all his friends and despite his big practice and his communal activities, even despite his newest interest – the Farm – he could find no contentment without her. They two disagreed on almost everything. She could not ever remotely understand what he wanted, what he hoped and strove for; but he needed her presence always.

He sent for her to come, quickly.

10

MILLIE GRAHAM POLAK

IN BOMBAY, Kasturbai took ship for South Africa. The eldest boy, Harilal, was left at school. She took the three younger lads with her, to the new home in Johannesburg.

After Bombay, the city to which she came could not but have been a nightmare for her. Bombay, ancient metropolis set on hills overlooking the sea, was a tapestry of lovely avenues, adorned with colleges, temples, gardens, bazaars. Even its slums had the dreary dignity of centuries of history. Johannesburg, though high upon the mountain side and with sunlight pouring down even in winter months, was no more than a mining town, fantastically expanding – a mining town founded only a few

years earlier, a raw community, despite its thousands of inhabitants and thousands more flooding in, since the discovery of gold, from all corners of the earth.

Streets teemed with beggars and princes, with white and yellow and black peoples. Olive Schreiner and her husband had been warned by friends, when they moved to the city, never to go out at night. Even the authorities advised those who had to use the streets after dark to walk in twos or threes and never to take a side street. Sandbagging was commonplace.

In the rough, fearsome, bandit-ridden town, Kasturbai found a house that seemed as strange as the people she met. At Durban, although her husband had insisted on certain European innovations, the home had been conducted upon Indian lines. She had of course observed strict purdah, as at Rajkot. But in Johannesburg the whole house on Albemarle Street was monstrous to her.

First, there was not a bedroom equipped with gutters, along which wash water and urine could be run outdoors, as in a decent Hindu home. There were eight rooms, a garden, an upstairs verandah – not an enclosed place where the wife was safely hidden from strangers. Gandhi announced that in this astonishing edifice there were to be even more ‘simplifications’ than at Durban earlier. He conceded that ‘it would be impossible to do with less than a certain amount of furniture,’ but demanded that ‘changes be made, even if they be more inward than outward.’

Only one servant was to be engaged, and the man was to live as one of the family. The three boys were to help with house-work. Though of course night-soil was removed by municipal sweepers, every member of the family was to keep his or her room clean. Each of them must carry down the chamber pot, daily. More, Polak was to live in the house. Polak was ‘a blood brother,’ Gandhi insisted.

Many beside Polak came to the house. One of those proved to be an Untouchable, who had turned Christian. Though all guests were expected to ‘practice self-help’ and look after their rooms, this young fellow – a clerk in Gandhi’s office – had not learned the rules, it proved. Gandhi would not have him embarrassed, on his first visit to the house. Kasturbai, as hostess, must look after any guest’s sanitary needs, he declared.

It was 'part of the education' he meant to give her, to shape her into the 'ideal wife' she must become, according to his new concepts.

In furious indignation she retorted that she would never perform so unspeakable a task as he asked.

'I will do it then,' he replied in a steely voice. Both knew that permitting a husband a defiling task would be a grave sin. Her lids were red with tears. But she carried down the pot. Day by day, she wept, but performed the hateful chore. Gandhi watched and did not relent, despite her helpless tears. And presently he shouted, 'Do it cheerfully! I will not allow this nonsense in my house!'

She sobbed out, 'Keep your house and let me go!' He snatched at her arm, dragging her to their gates. He tried to shove her out.

'You think, being your wife . . . I must put up with cuffs and kicks?' she cried. Compassion seemed dead in him as he stood glaring at her. 'Must you so far forget yourself? Where am I to go? I have no parents or relatives to harbour me!'

It was true. They both knew that a Hindu wife had no refuge when her husband drove her from his house. He tried 'to put on a brave face,' but he knew she was right. He closed the gates, as she asked. Not far from them lived the representative of the Empire. It was Kasturbai, with her simplicity, her native dignity, who knew, even in her terror and shame, what was proper to do.

He was thoroughly ashamed, though he did not admit it to her. He told himself: 'I can never subdue her spirit. She will not be forced.' He remembered that a Hindu wife 'is the object of her husband's desire, born to do his behest, rather than a helpmeet, a comrade, and a partner in his joys and sorrows.' Since his wedding night he had been struggling to make his wife a comrade, a partner; he had failed each time. It was not possible for him to have the perfect unity with her he desired. But he could not forget that she had spirit, pride, and her own wisdom. She had great beauty, besides.

She would never be like his friend Olive Schreiner, not even in the every day life of the home.

Existence after the war was hard for Olive Schreiner and her husband. Although Cronwright had managed to study law in an attorney's office in Johannesburg, he had neither the cases nor

the capital to provide more than merest living funds. However, he ran for Parliament and was elected, serving together with his wife's brother Will Schreiner, who resigned the post of Prime Minister to return to the lawmaking body of Transvaal. Olive Schreiner seemed unaware of the discomforts of poverty. She had put aside all her writing, except that which was done on behalf of ' the subject ' of South Africa.

She could not forget that Oom Paul had told her: ' For me, these blacks are no more than intelligent apes.' She had come to hate both him and Rhodes for their attitude to Negro and Indian. When invited to address the People's Congress, she made a passionate appeal for the rights of the natives. And her audience shouted, ' Hats off to Mrs. Schreiner, three cheers, lads!' But shortly afterwards her house had its roof ripped through by a bomb. Cronwright and she were the poorer thereafter.

It did not alter her course. Her writing, no longer novels read the world over, paid her very little. She gave herself almost wholly to composing brochures and articles on behalf of those whose cause she had undertaken. She wrote for the down-trodden, the exploited -- and among these she included her own sex. She made the issue of ' rights for women ' one of her life's concerns now.

To Gandhi, distinguished and successful lawyer, it was sustaining to have her friendship, given him as head of the Natal Indian Congress and editor of *Indian Opinion*. But her personal life in itself was an inspiration for him. In her invariably shabby and shapeless gown, and with her thick hair brushed roughly back, she seemed a symbol of the philosophy which Tolstoy preached. Her hands were calloused with daily toil. She cooked and scrubbed and laundered in her modest home.

It was she who chose to live with utmost simplicity, not her husband, although he followed her lead with reverence and love. Kasturbai was not like her.

But, if Gandhi's wife would not accept simplicity, hardship, of her own free will, her husband saw to it that she practiced both, whatever she felt. Clerks from his office continued to be asked to his home. Europeans, Brahmins, Untouchables, Moslems, were constantly received as his guests. Against her will, Kasturbai was obliged to reach toward his ideal.

Indeed, there was even introduced into the family a European female. Polak, who had been engaged for some time to a Scots-woman named Millie Graham, then in London, was persuaded by Gandhi to bring his fiancée to Johannesburg. On 30 December, 1905, Millie Graham arrived. At once she was taken to the Gandhi home, which she found a charming place, 'of the villa type,' and in it 'three little boys - Manilal, aged eleven, Ramdas, aged nine, and Devadas, who was six.' There were also 'a young Englishman, in the telegraph service, and a young Indian ward of Gandhi.' She herself, with Polak, were to be part of the family too.

At first the city authorities would not permit her marriage, in the belief that Polak, because he lived with Gandhi, was also 'coloured.' Rather wryly, Gandhi served as best man. He admired Millie because she 'did not waste money' on a special wedding gown. He liked her directness, her outspoken opinions. He admired her for having opinions.

Later, Gandhi declared that he himself 'never had a difference with the newly-married couple' and that he 'did not know what happened between his wife and Polak's bride,' yet he was aware that differences occurred, 'though no more than what happens in the best-regulated, homogeneous family.' His home must be 'a heterogeneous family,' and its members 'people of all kinds and temperaments, freely admitted' into it.

It was Millie Polak who achieved such harmony as ensued. She remembered always a call made with Kasturbai upon the two wives of a stolid, rather poor Indian, with the men hidden away and the two hostesses sitting in almost total, but contented and amiable, silence until the visitors left. Kasturbai seemed to enjoy the visit, but Millie Graham found it a wretched bore. There was too great a distance between herself and Kasturbai to be crossed, even in this slight matter.

However, into the house came presently still another European woman. West, another young Englishman who, like Polak, gave up his career to follow Gandhi's dream of founding a communal family, brought his bride to the family circle. She was a Leicestershire girl, who had had some experience of working in a shoe factory. It was Gandhi who arranged that she be brought from England, to be married at Johannesburg, as he had earlier persuaded Polak to bring over and marry Millie.

Mrs. West, too, became a permanent member of Kasturbai's household. As nearly as he could, Gandhi was building a great joint family, such as his father had headed. But Kasturbai knew that the old dewan would have turned in his grave could he have heard the principles on which his son was establishing this home.

Costs of maintaining the house became so huge, however, that to reduce expenditures Gandhi found it necessary to introduce still further innovations. He bought a hand-mill for seven pounds; bread would be baked at home. The iron wheel was so heavy that one man alone could not tackle it, though two could manage it easily. Gandhi had his three little sons help with the grinding now and then, and assured them that they did it as a 'game,' that their 'muscles were expanding with the exercise.'

Millie Polak, with her quick wit, was amused by the family's rising at six-thirty to grind flour. Nevertheless, she and Mrs. West, and Kasturbai as well, were sometimes drawn into the work. Kasturbai found herself doing the hard job of a peasant in some village hut. But she did not evade it. Yet — Gandhi noted this — whenever he would ask Millie Graham Polak to lend a hand, he would discover that 'Kasturbai found it was her own usual time to commence the kitchen work —.'

But she, like Kasturbai, had already learned that despite his gentleness, his charm, Mohandas Gandhi could be as unyielding as iron, when it was a question of some plan he had chosen to follow. By April 1906 Kasturbai and the boys — and Millie too — were living permanently at the farm — 'in order to follow a simpler form of life,' as Gandhi said. He himself rented a small room near his chambers, a hideaway where he lived when not at the farm.

Kasturbai was informed that their regime would be reduced to bare necessities. They would do without even ordinary refined sugar; fruits and puddings would be cooked in raw sugar. Since salt, other than in foods naturally, would be bad for health, it was to be eschewed hereafter. Tea would not be used, 'nor any other stimulant.' Although Gandhi at the beginning accepted cow's milk, he abandoned it because he felt 'it stimulated the lower passions.'

Millie Graham Polak revealed a surprising leadership in the colony. Later, she wrote with wit of her experiences there.

Although, like her husband, she accorded unstinted admiration for Gandhi, she was far from uncritical, refusing to abide by all his ordained 'atrocities,' particularly the injunction against tea. Nor would she accept his distrust of milk. There was a small baby in her arms now. She asked Gandhi: 'If milk is like that, young children would be nothing but little brutes, wouldn't they?'

The small Indian lawyer listened patiently. He never expected full understanding of his ideal. He wanted only their obedience. He continued making laws for the farm. Millie Polak's book about him – written years later – gave an account of 'earth poultices, cabinet steam baths followed by a plunge into a tub of icy water, colonic irrigations followed by acid fruit cures, and fasts' among 'some of his experiments.' But, when an earth poultice he prescribed all but killed her own baby, she announced that she 'would never have it tested again.'

It was to Millie that Kasturbai made known the results of another of his 'experiments' at the colony.

Olive Schreiner, in one of her articles on exploited and disregarded peoples – entitled 'The Woman's Movement of Our Day' and published in *Harper's Bazaar* – spoke out boldly for women's rights to equality with men, as workers, citizens, friends. She was not a speaker, as was Annie Besant, who had become one of the great orators of the time, eloquent, dazzling in imagery, believed by herself and her followers alike to be the reincarnation of Hypatia, indeed a goddess walking the earth. Since the time Gandhi had met her in London, she had become an accepted saint to many in India, and over the world; at Benares, sacred city by the Ganges, even men who believed woman was born only for the pleasure of the male gave her reverence. She preached against child-marriage, against enslavement of women, and scholars, priests and princes listened to her in awe.

With all of this Gandhi was in agreement. In his new colony, moreover, he not only spoke for the rights of women, but introduced their actual practice. He preached not only equal rights, but equal responsibilities. Work was expected of men and women alike; leadership was open to both equally. More – to erase all feeling of difference, Gandhi decreed that boys and girls should play and study and bathe together. The bathing

should be done in the nude, in order to prove that spiritual vision conquered the base and physical. Herman Kallenbach was sceptical about this. But to change Gandhi was impossible, he like others knew, when the matter was an ideal, a principle.

It was Kasturbai who found that the ideal could not be practised.

There was unchastity among the young people. She took her discovery to Millie Polak, who promptly went to Gandhi with the news. He was shocked to the heart. In penance, he entered upon a fast, for his failure to shield those under his care. They on their part were overwhelmed with remorse. But Gandhi felt certain that the failure of his experiment lay in lack of protection against temptation; to protect the young people, it was necessary that temptation be removed. The girls must have their hair shaven off. Although the maidens wept and pleaded, he was obdurate. He himself chopped off their locks. The mixed bathing was discontinued, however.

Millie Polak, with her wholesome Scottish humour, has told the story of this incident. Even in old age, she remembered it, but with a warm and gentle admiration for the man who believed that all must and could see and live according to his own highest vision, his sons, his wife, his colony members alike.

This determination of Gandhi's was again apparent when from Bombay came Harilal, the eldest son. He came sullenly. His father had dismissed suggestions that arrangements be made for university education, in preparation for some profession.

Gandhi had come to believe that child-marriage must be abolished. He held firmly to faith in equality between the sexes – though in his own marriage, to be sure, he seemed not quite to practise this belief. He believed in 'simplicity,' and in work with the hands. Kallenbach and Polak, West and Maganlal Gandhi, knew themselves to be his disciples in these tenets. But they did not agree with him in one further principle which he had set – that tilling the soil, grinding flour, helping build shacks, and aiding Polak in putting out *Indian Opinion*, constituted an adequate substitute for formal schooling of any grade.

Harilal Gandhi insisted that his father must provide an education for him.

No plans were made, though weeks passed. Resentment

festered in the boy's breast. His father walked with Ramdas and Devadas, the two youngest sons, to the train for Johannesburg, a distance of five miles. Occasionally Gandhi would give 'lessons' to his small sons, by conversations on books, history, religion. Was not this, he asked, better teaching than given in a schoolroom?

Kasturbai Gandhi, who could not even read, had no opinion on the question. But she knew that her two elder boys were fuming; they could not be persuaded to abandon demands for college training.

Suddenly, it became known that Harilal had married a girl named Gulab; he had not even asked permission of his father. Although Gandhi espoused equality for all, it infuriated him that his boy had married, without even discussing the matter. His own marriage in childhood seemed to him a tragedy. He was determined to shield his sons from such a tragedy. Child-marriage he knew to be a major disease in the social system, something to be eradicated, although their faith sanctioned, even encouraged it. And his eldest son had married, a mere boy.

He refused to receive his son's bride. The rejection only made Harilal more devoted to her. Kasturbai vainly tried to coax forgiveness for her eldest boy. She herself had missed the joy of playing in a great wedding a leading part, as the groom's mother. But she knew she wanted only to have Harilal in his father's good graces again. Instead, estrangement between father and son heightened.

Harilal took care to show that he felt Gandhi was neglecting his duty as parent, in refusing to make arrangements at once for training which would prepare the two elder sons for some profession by which to earn a living.

Then, a child was born to the young couple, a girl, whom they named Rami. Kasturbai, instead of being able to enjoy the pride which should have come to her in achieving status as grandmother, had to cope with the coldness of her eldest boy on one hand, and Gandhi's anger on the other. But she found a solution, through her innate wisdom: Harilal and Gulab were persuaded to come to the colony, and with their baby to participate in its membership. Harilal did not abandon his desire and hope for education. But he was now part of the life which Gandhi wished his family to share.

Gandhi forgave the marriage, after a period of anger. Gulab and Rami became treasured companions of his rare moments of leisure. But he made clear that, like his wife and sons, the new daughter-in-law and even her baby, in due course, must follow the pattern he set. Of others, to be sure, he expected no more than they were capable of attaining. But of his wife and sons, of his son's wife and child, he demanded full practice of what he believed to be the perfect life. He would have no less than perfection from them. Kasturbai long ago had learned this.

Then came rumours of a war about to break out. At Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1897 – not quite a decade ago – there had gathered in London Prime Ministers of all her colonies, with their wives, their families. There were troops from all dependencies, marching magnificently with British and Scots, Irish and Welsh regiments. Dazzlingly arrayed units came all the way from Hong Kong, Borneo, Nigeria, India; but the most superb, it was said, came from Natal, South Africa. Illuminations in London were repeated over much of the earth, in towns and cities of the Empire. But in 1906 war exploded again, with the Zulu Rebellion, five years after Victoria's son had been crowned King and Emperor.

Gandhi immediately volunteered to care for the wounded, as he had done in the Boer War. This time, too, Olive Schreiner and he were on opposite sides; she sided with the Zulus, as earlier she had done with the Boers. Gandhi however still believed that if his countrymen 'showed they are at one with the Government, their cause must prevail.'

When he was about to leave, he could not forget how frail Kasturbai had looked. He told himself: 'She is mere skin and bones.' She was not well. She would be lost, among the Gujarati, Parsee, Moslem and Christian members, without her husband nearby. How could she understand the Deists, atheists, Hindus among whom she would be thrown solely on her own?

The Zulu War revealed brutalities never surpassed in other uprisings. Gandhi showed again the same fearlessness that he had revealed in the Boer War. Peace was restored, and he was decorated, a second time, 'for extraordinary bravery under fire.' But he returned home with vitally personal matters in mind.

Twice, he had tried to live apart from his wife; he had failed

both times. He meant to try again. Upon reaching his Farm, he called together his close friends there. He told them that he wished to take the sacred vow of *Brahmacharya*. Literally, it meant 'practice of self-restraint,' including food and comforts; but, above all, it required complete celibacy.

Gandhi asked his friends, could a man dedicate himself wholly to a mission, unless he freed himself of need for his wife? Should he not give up all earthly possessions, to live utterly for the service of men? To do this, he must give up his intimate life with her whom he loved best, his wife.

The men who heard him understood that, once taken, this vow he had in mind could never be broken. It must be kept to the end of life. The decision, they felt, must therefore lie with Kasturbai herself.

Gandhi went to her. He explained that originally his motive when considering continence had been to spare her more pregnancies, and later to lessen his economic burden. But his entire concept had altered, in the lonely hours of nursing, during the war just ended. He was earning an income of \$30,000 annually, one of the largest in South Africa. Yet he found no peace. He would have none, he knew, until liberated to do his task, to accomplish the mission unto which he must devote his whole life. Only then would he be happy.

Never had she refused him when he wanted her; she had not refused his earlier requests to try continence. She agreed that he should take the vow. They were both thirty-seven years old, when their union as lovers ended.

And strangely, the conflict between them ended too. Gandhi's vow did not shield him from dreams in which his wife came to him. What she thought and remembered, she did not say. Throughout their marriage, she had remained 'reticent.' Very possibly she was grateful to be spared further child-bearing. A different sort of marriage seemed to begin for them both.

II

SONYA SCHLESIN

IT BECAME CLEAR SOON to Gandhi that either his new colony or part of his duties in behalf of the Indian community must be given up, because of sheer lack of clerical help. Mountainous mail lay unanswered, relating to his practice, to his magazine, to Phoenix Farm. He realized that finding a male secretary in Johannesburg appeared impossible; to obtain one from Durban was equally beyond expectation, because of grim laws enacted, since the war, to keep Natal Indians from entering Transvaal. In near despair, he admitted: 'No white woman will work for a coloured man, like me.'

Then, to his delighted astonishment, he received word that a girl just arrived from Scotland, Millie Polak's country, 'had no objection to working for an Indian.' He sent for her. His first question was: 'Don't you mind serving under an Indian?' And she assured him that she 'did not mind at all.'

He began dictating to her immediately. In Miss Dick, Gandhi encountered a woman of the new twentieth century, the stenographer, very symbol of the 'rights' which Mrs. Besant and Olive Schreiner were demanding for their sex. Almost as soon as she came, Miss Dick was given charge of Gandhi's account books; soon she had management of funds adding to thousands of pounds, including not only Gandhi's moneys but those of the Natal Indian Congress.

She became as a sister, a daughter, to her employer.

When, only too soon, she decided to choose from many suitors the man she wished to marry, she asked Gandhi's advice; when she married, her employer was best man at the wedding.

But he was now confronted once again with a problem. 'How find another like her?'

Luck favoured him a second time. Herman Kallenbach, his friend, learned of a girl named Sonya Schlesin, a Russian Jewess, also from Scotland, who was looking for a job. Although

planning to teach, she was a first-rate typist, and 'had absolutely no colour prejudice.'

Gandhi asked her to come to his office for an interview.

She proved to be only seventeen, a small, alert girl with dark straight hair cut short, like a boy's. She was dressed in a severe costume consisting of shirt, stiff collar and tie, and wore no jewellery. The salary she asked was a third of that received by Miss Dick. Although younger than Gandhi's son Harilal, she had no reverence for age or position. She possessed a strange, dramatic quality; she proved to have fire and imagination, but no romantic interests, as had her predecessor. She plunged into her job and never seemed to care how long the hours were, how late at night she left.

When offered an increase presently, she snapped: 'I'm here because I like the work, and your ideals!' Never had Gandhi known a woman who worked with a man for purely abstract objectives, and only because she admired his ideals. In her whole being she denied all that Kasturbai – and for that matter, Millie Polak – embodied. Between Sonya and Gandhi arose a friendship wholly impersonal, yet profoundly deep. Her hands and her mind were at the service of his cause.

To her he gave full responsibility for arranging his committee and public meetings; he dictated to her letters on most delicate questions of Indian strategy. When necessary, she went out, however late the hour, on the dangerous streets of Johannesburg, if some task needed doing in the evening or at night. When offered an escort she would retort she 'needed no such thing.' To Gandhi's public work she offered a selfless, sacrificial devotion, as to something which was her true love.

How could Kasturbai have understood her? Never did Sonya take advantage of the admiration she evoked in Gandhi. One day she asked for a loan of forty pounds. When he urged her to accept it as a gift, she retorted emphatically: 'I pay what's lent me!' She repaid it, bit by bit, until the debt was erased.

How could one compensate her, a woman without personal desire, whose only wish was to help his cause?

There was time to do a hundred things impossible before. Gandhi began a campaign for sanitary reform in Johannesburg Indian slums; and when he took cases to court, he lost only one out of seventy. The poor called him 'Gandhibai' – Brother

Gandhi. And he felt to them as brother. He had never known the contentment which was now his.

He was even able to spend more time at 'Phoenix Farm,' to experiment with cooking, with digging the soil. He learned to make sandals and to sew; he stitched together a jacket for Kasturbai, insisting it fit her perfectly. He resumed the rather fitful education of his youngest sons, though he declared that they must above all 'learn to live in the world as they find it.' Harilal still felt anger because university education still was denied, but Gandhi brushed this aside.

Members of 'Phoenix Farm' were asked to call him *Bapu* – Father. He felt himself to be not merely the father of his own sons, but of all in the big colony.

There were many who honoured him. A Baptist minister was to write a biography of him. Olive Schreiner and Cronwright were his appreciative friends. Polak and Kallenbach, West, Maganlal Gandhi gave him their whole devotion. If Kasturbai was bewildered, unhappy, it did not count for her husband, with the light of his vision and its achieving before him. On the walls of his office hung two portraits, one of Tolstoy, the other of Annie Besant, who lately had published an eloquent book of lectures on *Hindu Ideals* for use by Hindu students in the schools and colleges of India. The book was a plea for the practice of Hinduism by all the people.

Gandhi himself had come to believe that his own faith was a modified form of Hinduism. In his daily life, he was trying to express that faith. It seemed that all he had ever sought to find was being revealed to him, that all he had desired to live by was coming within reach of his attainment, not too far off. His practice was flourishing; his two colonies were growing constantly larger. He had time to share in the experience of Phoenix far oftener than he had dreamed of; Sonya Schlesin was as another pair of hands, another quick and willing brain, to help his work.

Kasturbai had been severely anaemic for some time. A serious operation was advised because of her frequent internal haemorrhage. Because of the anaemia, no anaesthetic was used; she endured the pain with extraordinary fortitude. Gandhi left Durban for his office in Johannesburg, but word soon came that she had suffered a relapse, that she was fainting repeatedly. He

took the next train back, and rushed to the doctor's house, where she was. She had been given meat broth – to keep her alive, said the doctor. The food was essential, he insisted, if she were to be saved in this emergency.

Once, when Manilal was small and critically ill of typhoid, Gandhi had refused to give his son beef broth, although warned by the doctors that this alone would save his little boy; the lad had recovered, without partaking of food made from meat. Now it was Kasturbai who was so ill that the doctor insisted she must have beef broth, to save her life. How was one to decide, for her? She must make up her own mind, Gandhi knew. Ill though she was, seemingly hardly able to understand what was said to her, he knew it to be his 'painful duty' to press the question with her.

She managed to articulate an answer to him: 'It is a rare thing . . . in this world to be . . . born as a human being . . . and I would far rather . . . die in your arms . . . than pollute my body with such . . . abominations.' She was a simple, earthy woman. She obeyed what she had been taught. But she was prepared to die for it if need be.

Gandhi stammered, 'You are not bound to follow me.'

She whispered, 'Take me away . . . at once . . .'

In astonished indignation, the doctor protested that she could not stand the least handling after her operation and haemorrhage. Gandhi said it was for her to decide, how to die, and for what, if need be. It was a drizzling day; the rickshaw could not be taken inside the station, so Gandhi carried her over the large platform to the train. She was a tiny bundle of skin and bones, almost dead. They went the twelve miles to the next station; six men from Phoenix Farm met them, with a hammock, since driving her in a cart was out of the question. She said: 'Nothing will happen to me, Mohana, don't worry.'

And she did not die.

Hearing of her miraculous escape from death, a Hindu swami came to chant sacred verses of thanksgiving and to pray for her full recovery. Gandhi – standing nearby – knew that 'to her, the scriptural texts were a sealed book,' since even their little sons Devadas and Ramdas were 'more learned in holy writings than she.' She listened reverently for a time to the holy man. But when he began discoursing on the harmlessness of taking beef

tea in an emergency, she broke in: 'Swamiji – dear Mr. Swami – whatever you say, I do not want to recover by means of beef juice, so pray don't worry me any more. You may discuss this with my husband and children if you like. But my mind is made up.'

As she convalesced from her illness a more serene relationship established itself between her and Gandhi. When he wrote his autobiography some years later, he remembered every word she said. He paid tribute to her courage and her spirit, to her innate nobilities of faith.

He saw to it that she ate 'only simple non-stimulating food,' as Millie Polak observed, not without friendly irony. Somewhere, recalled Gandhi, he had read that pulse must be omitted from the diet of 'weak-bodied persons.' Kasturbai, however, refused to give up the vegetable. Gandhi quoted experts, but, sick though she was, she would not change her mind. In the end – probably in exhaustion – she asked if her husband did not enjoy pulse, which as he and she knew was one of his favourite foods. Indeed, he had given up all pet dishes, had rejected spices and condiments, yet pulse remained a weakness he could not conquer.

It seemed to him 'a chance to shower love on her,' and he returned delightedly: 'If I were ailing and the doctor advised me to give up pulse, or any other article, I'd unhesitatingly do so. But there – without any medical advice, I give up pulse, for one year, whether you do or not!'

She gasped. 'For heaven's sake! Take back your vow. This is too hard on me!'

It was impossible to retract a vow, as they were aware. But, as he assured her, he 'wanted the restraint,' it 'would be a test,' as well as 'a sacred support' for her own abstinence. She wept, but the vow remained, of course. To him, this incident was to be 'the sweetest recollection' in his coming years. It was a revelation of *Satyagraha* (truth-force or love-force) with Kasturbai, on her own honest and unpretending level. He did not *force* her, he merely used moral pressure through self-sacrifice to persuade her to do what he wanted and knew to be right.

To his grateful joy, she rallied quickly, though she was never to be robust again. He claimed that it was not due to diet that she became well, but rather to their 'mutual yielding one unto

the other,' out of respect and love. That had not been their relationship before.

But even while she was still not quite herself, word came that he was needed in Johannesburg. He had been away with Kasturbai nearly two weeks.

He hurried back to work, with Sonya Schlesin waiting for him. There was a new law proposed for Transvaal. It must not be passed.

12

OLIVE SCHREINER

A DRAFT of the proposed ordinance was published in August, 1906. Gandhi perceived that its intention was to make remaining in South Africa so unpleasant for all Transvaal Indians, that they would leave the country. It would require every Indian to be registered and fingerprinted, and to carry a registration card at all times. Fines and imprisonment were to be imposed for disobedience. Policemen were to search men, and women as well, in homes and even on the streets for the registration cards.

Indians called it 'The Black Act.'

Gandhi knew that action must be taken quickly. Sonya Schlesin was told to find any auditorium she could hire. Only one place was available to the Indian community, a theatre owned by a Johannesburg Jew.

In it, on 11 September, 1906, gathered a multitude never before seen in the city – bankers, hawkers, teachers, money-lenders, priests, shopkeepers, Untouchable labourers, ship-owners, Brahmin pundits. A businessman opened proceedings. He announced that Gandhi had prepared a resolution 'which must be passed, with God as our witness.' Gandhi now stepped forward. He explained that what had been said implied 'a religious vow, which once taken cannot be broken.' He added: 'For me, there is only one course. Not to obey the law, though it cost my life.'

His resolution was read and passed. Every man present pledged himself to disobey the law, though it might mean death.

A mass movement was initiated that evening. Next day, the theatre burned down; the people believed it an omen. Gandhi himself knew he must find a name for this new movement of 'mass-yet-individual' opposition to government unfairness.

Maganlal Gandhi suggested *Sadagraha* – 'firmness in a good cause.' Gandhi amended it to *Satyagraha*, 'the force born of Truth and Love.' *Ahimsa* connoted nonviolence, nonkilling, hence nonresistance. *Satyagraha* implied a positive resistance to evil, a war against evildoers, but without violence. It meant a battle fought without striking a blow, or firing a shot. Here was the name for the war to begin against those who wished to do evil in South Africa.

Before beginning the war, it was necessary to try prevention of it. Gandhi left for England, with a countryman; it was his first visit to London since the student years spent there. Winston Churchill, recently made Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, was far from friendly to native peoples of the Empire. But the King Emperor, Edward the Seventh, was urbane, warm-hearted. It encouraged Gandhi to meet in London Dadabhai Naoroji, 'the Grand Old Man of India,' who had been elected by a British constituency to the British Parliament.

Gandhi himself was invited to appear before this highest lawmaking body of the realm; and so well did he present his case that on the way back to South Africa he received a cable from London, announcing that Lord Elgin, Secretary of State for the Colonies, would not advise King Edward to sign the Transvaal Registration Act.

In his joy, Gandhi cabled the news to Leo Tolstoy, whom he had never met, but whom he had revered since reading *The Kingdom of God is Within You*. On reaching South Africa, however, he discovered that he had been tricked: Transvaal was to cease being a Crown Colony on 1 January 1907, and any law could be re-enacted at the wish of the local legislators.

Immediately, Gandhi advised his countrymen to refuse registration and fingerprinting. The Act was adopted, to go into effect on 31 July 1907.

Gandhi, among many other Indians, refused to take out the required permits. He was arrested on 11 January 1908. By 30

January, a hundred and fifty others were in jail with him. On that day a messenger came to take him to General Smuts, now head of Transvaal. The former military leader, a friend of Olive Schreiner's, held a friendly chat with the prisoner, confiding that although he 'couldn't disregard Europeans, who insisted on the Registration Act,' he would promise 'to make any alterations' which Gandhi suggested. He declared that the entire Act would be repealed if Gandhi would accept the compromise of first undergoing voluntary registration.

Gandhi accepted the terms. He was free, and the rest in prison were released the next morning.

Sonya was told to arrange for another meeting in Johannesburg. Those who came were quick to reveal indignation. A man shouted: 'Gandhi has sold us out to Smuts – for fifteen thousand pounds!' Even the moderates were doubtful whether 'Smuts could be trusted.' Gandhi tried to explain: 'Satyagraha requires trust, even toward an adversary. Though *enforced* registration would be degrading, *voluntary* would be an act of generosity, ennobling in itself.' A voice roared: 'I shall kill the first who takes the lead in applying for registration!'

Nevertheless, that week Gandhi went to register. A mob attacked him; he was almost killed. He was taken to the home of the Reverend Doke, and as soon as his wounds were stitched asked that the head of the Registration Bureau come to him so that he could give his fingerprints and keep his promise to Smuts.

It was more than a week before Kasturbai, waiting alone at the Farm, knew what had happened. Sonya Schlesin brought Gandhi to be nursed by his wife. Kasturbai, who had not the slightest conception of what could impel their countrymen to attack him, spent herself, precarious though her own health remained since the operation, bringing him back to 'sound limbs and body.'

Then a great blow fell. Smuts did not have the Act repealed; only those who had voluntarily registered were exempt from its provisions. Those who had doubted Smuts before now blamed Gandhi for his credulity, but though he was 'astonished' and felt that he did not know how he could 'face the community,' he took up the struggle again with zest and cheerfulness.

In October he was again arrested, for 'instigating civil

disobedience.' (While in prison he read for the first time Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*, and for a time thereafter used the phrase to describe the resistance movement. Later he felt it did not really convey the full meaning of the struggle and so adopted the phrase 'Civil Resistance.') Harilal also was in jail with him, for practising *Satyagraha*.

The jail term ended in December, but by February 1909 he was back in prison. He wrote his second boy, Manilal, cheerfully — asking after Gulab, Rami, Kasturbai, the two little brothers Ramdas and Devadas. He was glad that Mother had been able to walk. He was certain that Manilal — now eighteen — must find nothing more satisfying than to make Harilal's wife feel less badly, in the absence of her husband, and must be very content at being given opportunity also to serve as guardians of Ramdas and Devadas. He was proud that Manilal could so well bear the burdens on his young shoulders. But it was apparent, between the lines, that Harilal, in prison with their father, caused Gandhi a certain uneasiness of mind.

The letter continued, without naming Harilal, though it said:

You should not trouble about education, which should be not mere knowledge of letters, but knowledge of duty . . . What can be better than that you have the opportunity to nurse Mother and cheerfully bear her complaints? . . . Remember, henceforth our lot is poverty. The more I think of it, the more I feel it is more blessed to be poor than rich.

This bleak prospect was, seemingly, expected to exhilarate Manilal. Gandhi had made up his mind to abandon his great practice entirely, soon. He would live wholly for mankind, his true family. His sons would acquire education by working with their father for the family of all men and women. Manilal must understand this. Harilal must come to accept it, also.

Nevertheless, despite his programme, which was based on making his own children no more his personal responsibility than any other human creature, he was stunned on reaching Phoenix Farm, from prison, to learn that a tragedy, a scandal, had taken place. Millie Polak, the practical, clear-eyed Scots-woman, knew of it. Kasturbai herself knew about it also; she had remained silent, however. The scandal involved Manilal, her second son. The gentle, obedient young boy had fallen

under a married woman's physical spell.

So shocked was Gandhi, that he could not at first believe what he was told.

He entered upon a fast, in penance for failing to prevent his son's sin. Millie Polak could not persuade him that the woman was a schemer. No; it was his own fault, insisted Gandhi. He should have protected the two involved. Nevertheless he was adamant in refusing permission to marriage between Manilal and the woman. Indeed, he would not so much as permit friendship to continue between them, as long as they lived. Nonetheless, he went to the woman and nagged at her relentlessly until she agreed it was right to have her hair cut off, in token of repentance.

He had a constantly growing budget to meet, despite the economies. The combination of Phoenix Farm near Durban, *Indian Opinion*, which was published at the farm, the maintenance of his house at Johannesburg, travel to and from the farm, keeping an office for law practice, and his lavish hospitality to all who came proved so costly finally that he saw he must sacrifice at least one of his interests – *Indian Opinion*.

Yet, as he said to friends: 'It is the only organ in behalf of the Indian in South Africa.' Olive Schreiner, as writer and propagandist, could understand the need for it. It was the one voice which Indians had to speak for them in either Natal or Transvaal.

There came to Gandhi a plan. Why not establish a second colony, like Phoenix Farm, but near Johannesburg, accessible to his home and his office? Herman Kallenbach, the big, buoyant millionaire who had given up his business to aid at Phoenix Farm, contributed land, to establish a new colony. It was named Tolstoy Farm and members flocked to it quickly when it was opened in 1910.

Gandhi planned to stay there as often as he could. Some day, he hoped, he would be able to make his permanent home there. Kasturbai and the boys would be sent to the farm, at intervals. It was Millie Polak who expressed the dissatisfaction which she and Kasturbai shared. 'Leaving the conveniences of a city will not be very pleasant,' she announced frankly.

In both of his communal colonies he was called *Bapu*, or Father; often the suffix *ji* was added, to connote respect and

love. He, who had been prone to rages when frustrated, whose temper remained hot and quick, had become *Bapuji*, gentle, tolerant and perceptive; he even had a quiet, endearing humour, which though it never expressed itself in jest, was revealed in a sort of boyish playfulness. He used the humour to ease a difficult situation or to soften a necessary reproof. But the reproof was always given, when he thought necessary. He could be stern in gentleness, his people knew.

To his wife and children he revealed no leniency. He made clear to Harilal and Manilal now that there was no use in fretting, pleading, resenting; they would not be sent to the university. It would be a waste of time, money, and work, as he saw it.

He drove his elder sons the harder, at tasks he set in the Farm programme. Even the two youngest boys, Ramdas and Devadas, were made to work harder, longer, than other children. With heavy heart, Kasturbai would watch her youngsters routed out of bed at dawn, however icy the morning, to chop wood, or dig the earth. Her own small hands were never at rest; she cooked, washed, swept, scrubbed, sewed. That was her destiny, since to obey a husband was the religious duty of a Hindu wife. But her sons were not women. For them, she ate out her heart. For them, she resented the 'cause' which their father made his life's love.

For her, their sons were the only 'cause' she saw sacred in life.

Very possibly, she knew Olive Schreiner by name. But, how could Kasturbai comprehend the woman her husband admired? A woman who made it her personal duty to battle for the Bantus and the Indians, as if she were of their people? That she was a famous writer could mean nothing at all to Kasturbai.

Early in 1909 the *Review of Reviews* published Mrs. Schreiner's portrait – a still nobly handsome head, despite heavy cheeks and chin – to illustrate an article on the 'native problem' in South Africa. The article was in part an address given at the Inter-Colonial Congress. Its gist was expressed in one paragraph:

There are nine million people in South Africa . . . eight million are dark-skinned . . . There is a small body of Asiatics . . . If I were asked what in South Africa is our greatest need I would answer, great men to lead us.

The dark-skinned man was 'here to stay,' she added. He had built the country to its richest. A dark-skinned leader was as acceptable to her as any other. She accepted Mohandas Gandhi as friend, and as leader of a people.

But Gandhi knew that to drive out his people was now the inflexible purpose of the Union of South Africa. Churchill, who in 1911 became First Lord of the Admiralty, opposed all that Gandhi fought to attain for Indians.

Hundreds upon hundreds were imprisoned in the *Satyagraha* 'war.' Men were beaten in prison; many were beaten to death. There was no resistance offered by prisoners. Word of South African atrocities reached India finally, and Gokhale – revered leader of the Indian Nationalist movement – sailed, to see what was happening to his people in Transvaal and to assist Gandhi if he could.

He saw the jails, he met the prisoners. He met Kallenbach, Polak, West, Sonya Schlesin. 'How many can be relied on to work with you in a crisis?' he asked Gandhi. There were 'about sixty,' was the answer, 'but though few, they were dedicated and victory was possible to achieve eventually.'

Sonya Schlesin was the only one of the group who had not as yet been arrested. Therefore she often had sole charge of Gandhi's work. She typed his letters; he signed them without revision, declaring that her English was better than his own, and that besides she knew as well as he what to reply to correspondents. She never hesitated to tell a man to his face what she thought of him; when threats were made against Gandhi by decriers she confronted them unflinchingly. What Gandhi called her 'impetuosity' often got him into trouble, he knew; but he believed that her 'open and guileless nature healed the difficulties she created.'

Among those who worked with him, there was none more loyal to him than she. Hundreds of Indians had learned to come to her for guidance, whenever he was away at the Farm, abroad, or in jail. In her years of work with Gandhi she had matured from a sharp-tongued youngster, to a woman capable of serving his cause fearlessly, capably. A group picture of his office staff showed her with spectacles on her nose, a white shirt accenting her dark hair and skin. She looked an average woman, but there was evident a quality of alertness and the

dignity of self-respect. Gokhale declared: 'I have rarely met with the sacrifice, the purity, and the fearlessness I have seen in Miss Schlesin. Among your co-workers, she takes first place in my estimation.'

When Gandhi was to write his autobiography, he would say: 'Sonya Schlesin is one of the noblest beings I have known.' Gokhale himself, in the report he gave before a public meeting held in Bombay the winter following his visit to South Africa, declared of Gandhi: 'He has in him the marvellous spiritual power to turn ordinary men into heroes and martyrs.' This power was revealed with women, as with men. He made Sonya Schlesin reach toward greatness, because he needed it of her.

It was strange that he who had struggled – and failed – to make of his wife the 'ideal' comrade and co-worker he hungered to have, could in other women of many kinds evoke a greatness of soul, to answer the call he made for greatness in them. Most of them were very simple persons. Millie Polak was not a follower in his cause. But although she had left Phoenix Farm, she came to 'char' bread and potatoes for Gokhale, who suffered from diabetes and could not eat much starch. Gandhi admired Millie, for her 'wonderful simplicity,' first revealed to him when she refused to waste money on a wedding dress. West's wife – who still worked as a member of Phoenix Farm while her husband edited *Indian Opinion* there – remained the Leicestershire shoe-factory girl, without much physical beauty. Gandhi thought her a 'beautiful lady' because of her 'pure heart.' An old woman, a Theosophist, toddled about her tasks, calling Gandhi 'Bapu,' and he gave her especial tenderness, as valued member of the Farm and ancient daughter of its family. Kasturbai alone remained immune to his spiritual power. Further she was jealous of all other women, excepting the two whom her husband himself most admired, Annie Besant and Olive Schreiner.

Mrs. Schreiner had, of late, been ill with a serious heart ailment. Even so, she did not spare herself. She spent herself, as had become her custom, upon the propaganda which she and her husband together wrote. She found time for an exquisite poem, however, 'The Bird of Truth': the bird's seeker died on a mountain side, clasping in his hand only a feather from its wings.

At Benares, by the sacred Ganges, Annie Besant was delivering an already celebrated series of lectures, 'Wake Up, India!' She pleaded for 'one nation' in her adopted land; she who had begun as radical, as revolutionary, who had discarded Christianity, had become the accepted voice of traditional religion in India. Her white sari draped about her silvery hair, her face still perfectly moulded and serenely calm, she appeared the very portrait of pundit, religious leader and saint; to many, as to herself, she was indeed a goddess reborn on earth. Though about her had been gathering whispers of scandal and ironic questioning centred upon Charles W. Leadbeater, her present associate in the Theosophical movement, she herself remained aloof. When Leadbeater went on trial for corrupting her young male disciples, her purity and holiness were never questioned. She was the voice of Hindu faith, at its highest.

To Gokhale she made it a point to say that she believed the work of Gandhi in South Africa should not be encouraged. She believed him a 'dangerous radical.'

Olive Schreiner stood steadfastly by Gandhi, throughout. But her health finally broke completely. It was found necessary to have her go to Capetown to recover. Presently she left for England, where great physicians could be consulted. Her husband did not accompany her; it was explained that he remained in Transvaal because an income must be earned for them both.

Gandhi himself faced another battle for the Indian people, at the time. The Cape Colony Supreme Court in 1913 handed down a judgment that nullified all marriages performed after Hindu, Moslem or Zoroastrian rites. Indian women would be in the position of concubines; their children would be illegitimate, unable to inherit their father's property.

13

KASTURBAI

FOR THE FIRST TIME, the problem of South African Indians became a woman's problem. For the first time, Kasturbai understood that there was a 'public work' in which she too must take part. She, who had never participated in any movement, who had been not only indifferent but often deeply resentful toward the tasks her husband undertook, knew that a duty was laid upon her, that this was a cause she must join.

Gandhi asked the Government to abrogate the law. He was told that not even an amendment would be made. He thereupon sent a group from Phoenix Farm - which was in Natal - to cross the border into Transvaal, without permits of entry. They were arrested and jailed.

A group was also sent from Tolstoy Farm, near Johannesburg, to cross into Natal - without permits of departure. This was a band of women, and among them was Kasturbai Gandhi. Many of the marchers had never been outside purdah. The Moslem wives and daughters, wearing masks over their faces, the Hindus with veils or folded saris, marched to the border. Authorities did not know what to do with them. No arrests were made, and they simply kept on marching.

Yet the Transvaal women sought imprisonment. At the coal mines near Newcastle they persuaded the men to strike. Police thereupon arrested them. Kasturbai found herself in jail, with prostitutes, thieves, and rowdy scolds of the streets. But this she had elected to suffer for a cause she held sacred.

Jailing high-caste Indian ladies set off a flame which blazed through South Africa quickly. Two thousand men, with about a hundred and twenty-five women, surged about Gandhi, for a march into Transvaal. Gandhi was arrested and jailed; released; re-arrested. The rest of the marchers were finally also arrested. Polak and Kallenbach were given three months at hard labour, and West was presently jailed in his turn.

Sonya Schlesin had full charge of the movement. If there was need, she went out at night, on the dangerous Johannesburg streets, to deliver a message or to hurry from house to house, arranging a meeting the next morning. She had sole charge of the Congress funds; her incorruptibility was never doubted. None questioned her devotion, her objectivity and her abilities. With West in jail, she took responsibility for editing *Indian Opinion*. When Kasturbai returned, after her sentence, to Phoenix Farm, Sonya added responsibility for her to other duties.

This, Kasturbai accepted as her own *Satyagraha*.

The women arrested with Kasturbai were also released, shamefacedly enough. Other women, however, continued to be jailed. Men crowded every prison cell.

Sonya Schlesin's energy never slackened, her devotion never waned. As able as a man, as brave as a soldier, as self-effacing as a Jain monk, she risked her very life day by day, for a cause in which she was not herself involved.

It was she who helped make sure that the cause became known in India, too. The flaming indignation blazing throughout South Africa was at last reflected in the motherland. Gokhale sent over two emissaries – both Englishmen, one a clergyman named Charles F. Andrews, who long had been a friend of India, and the other man as devoted, W. W. Pearson by name. They found that what had been heard of the South African situation was in no way exaggerated. Women of purity, whose only offence was protesting against desecration of their status as wives and mothers – women symbolized by Gandhi's own wife – were in the prisons of Transvaal. Men imprisoned were being beaten, sometimes to death; no resistance was ever offered by those fighting the *Satyagraha* war.

As best they could, Gokhale's emissaries took charge of the Indian community's problem. They directed the work of Gandhi's two colonies; they sent messages abroad. Sonya Schlesin herself, they discovered, had been collecting funds, mailing news to England as well as India. Now she kept the two deputies of Gokhale informed as to persons they could trust, policies Gandhi would wish followed, contributors on whom to rely for aid. The war Gandhi had inaugurated continued, and it was in part because of her zeal that it did not flag.

Smuts, himself, however, realized it was 'impossible to keep 20,000 people in gaol' forever. On 18 December, 1913, Gandhi, with Kallenbach and Polak, was released. A few days later, Sonya arranged a meeting at Durban for him to address. He came in dhoti and sandals. He had put aside European clothing, in mourning for those who died as martyrs in the war he led. His listeners were told that another march must begin; they pledged themselves to join, at any cost that befell.

But Smuts was ready to yield. In June 1914 an agreement was reached. It was a compromise, but Indian marriages were acknowledged to be legal, and Indians born in South Africa were accorded their rights as citizens. The war waged by *Satyagraha* ended in victory. Later, Smuts wrote:

It was my fate to be the antagonist of a man for whom I had the highest respect... He never forgot the human background, never lost his temper, or succumbed to hate, and preserved his gentle humour even in the most trying situations... His weapon consisted solely of deliberately breaking the law and organizing his followers into a mass movement to break the law, so that they would be arrested and bring their grievances before the conscience of the world.

The man to whom tribute was paid was not the lad whom Kasturbai had married. He was the man whom she and her sons knew. He was, however, a leader, steeled to sacrifice himself – and her, with their children, if needed – for the family of mankind.

He sent a letter to his brother Laxmidas to say that henceforth he could no longer contribute to support of the joint household at Rajkot. He permitted the premiums on his life insurance policy, taken out in Kasturbai's name, to lapse. Sonya Schlesin was told to wind up his law business. He gave up his great income to enter upon a life of poverty and work for his fellow beings. How funds would come, he did not know. That must be placed in God's hands. The children were to be sent to India, where they would attend a school headed by Rabindranath Tagore, the famed poet. Passage was bought for England. Gandhi was to stop for a time in London, where Gokhale would meet him, to make plans for work in the future.

Olive Schreiner was supposedly still in London, and Gandhi

must have hoped to see her. On her arrival in England the winter before, a brilliant reception had been tendered her as 'world-known writer . . . one of the pioneers in the Advanced Woman's Movement.' Returning to London after her long absence, she wanted most of all to see Havelock Ellis. To her he had been 'as my other self'; to him she was 'the first woman in the world to be known by intimate revelation.' His life had become a tortured tragedy, with a homosexual wife who clung to him pitifully. He still thought Olive Schreiner 'the most wonderful woman of her time, as well as its chief artist in language.'

In the Spring she left London to seek health in Italy, and from there she begged Ellis to spend at least a fortnight with her, in her loneliness and illness. His wife did not forbid this. When Gandhi and Kasturbai sailed for England, Ellis and Mrs. Schreiner were travelling through Italy, seeing the galleries together. Then Ellis returned to England, and she remained in Florence.

Gandhi therefore was not to have Olive Schreiner to present him to her friends. But he did not require it. His fame preceded him; he was awaited with varying kinds of expectancy. Winston Churchill's circle despised him. Muriel Lester, daughter of a distinguished family, first heard of Gandhi as 'that upstart agitator, who has upset labour conditions in South Africa.' But others were prepared to lionize the hero of a strange war. Kasturbai, of course, was only a name to London.

When they had sat for a portrait, in 1897, when he brought the family to South Africa, twenty years before, Gandhi had been shown as a small, tense man, impeccably correct clothes crowned by striped tie and stiff collar. Kasturbai sat beside him, a dark blouse under her beautifully embroidered pale sari, and her hands folded upon her lap. Before they sailed now – in the summer of 1914 – they were given a party by South African friends, and a group picture was taken of them and their hosts. Amidst the others, garlanded with flowers, Gandhi stood in European clothing, but with trousers unpressed and in a labourer's shirt. Kasturbai was so tiny that she barely reached his shoulder, small though he was. She wore an exquisite sari, and on her forehead was painted the caste mark of those Twice Born. Her mouth was tense, her large eyes full of questioning.

The journey to England did not bring her calm. She could

only hope that conferences between her husband and Gokhale would end soon; they could then hurry on to India, and to their sons, their daughter-in-law, and grandchild. South Africa, its dreadful memories, its alien people would be forgotten.

Two days before their ship reached London, war was declared between Great Britain and Germany. They entered a city keyed to war.

14

SAROJINI NAIDU

IT ASTONISHED VISITORS to find Gandhi, not in a leading hotel, but at a lodging house, his wife doing the cooking, cleaning and laundering. Kasturbai rarely left their rooms. London was alive with men in khaki. But even in time of peace she would have been bewildered by the metropolis, with its grey stone buildings, lofty vaulted museums, its streets alight at evening to make a new kind of day, its cabs and tall buses, its brightly adorned theatres, the motor cars flashing past everywhere, the women walking bare-faced, cheeks painted, hair frizzed, and wearing skirts that hobbled ankles so tightly it was barely possible to walk, and that revealed tight shoes, tilted on steep heels. The pomp of Mayfair, the stately pageant of Belgravia, the riders on brown Rotten Row, the teeming slums, all were outside the understanding of one small woman who in her heart had never left Porbandar Town.

She hoped only that discussions between her husband and Gokhale would soon be completed. The old leader had made plain his plan that Gandhi be placed in a key position with the Indian National Congress party. But it became clear before she had been in London even a week, that they would not continue upon their journey homeward quickly. Gokhale had been stranded in Paris by the war; communications for the time were cut off between Paris and London and no one knew when Gokhale might return. Gandhi did not wish to leave without seeing him. While waiting, he turned his attention to his 'duty as regards the war.'

Before leaving Transvaal, Gandhi had coaxed Millie Polak into assenting to her husband's remaining, to see that Smuts kept the Agreement, although she had looked forward to living in Scotland and bringing up her children there. Sonya Schlesin was assigned a lesser task, to take to Smuts a pair of slippers which Gandhi with his own hands had made at Phoenix Farm, and which he sent the General in token of good feeling. These two things had seemed to wind up everything in South Africa. There was now a clear slate, on which to begin the story of work in India. But, with war just broken out, Gandhi knew that he must offer his services to the British forces again, precisely *because* of his experiences after the Boer and Zulu wars. It was his obligation to express his loyalty to the Crown, however greatly its representatives in South Africa, and in India also, proved themselves unworthy of the Empire's matchless standards of justice.

He offered to gather an Indian unit for ambulance service on the Western Front. The offer was received with mixed response. An editor asked 'whether Gandhi is a politician knowing how to call forth the emotions of the masses, or what his way of life implies, an ascetic, almost a saint.' His proposal was accepted, however, and he sent out a call for volunteers, from his countrymen; eighty at once enrolled. Next he appealed to the women to make uniforms. One group, composed of wives, sisters, and daughters of Indian diplomats, nabobs, and visiting rajahs, promised to cut cloth if he devised a pattern.

On a rainy day in late August – not quite two weeks after he had arrived – as he was having supper, eating it only as duty because he had caught a heavy cold, there came the sound of steps in the hallway. A woman was climbing up, with her servant following. She was one of the Lyceum members, bringing the bundle of cloth which had been cut according to Gandhi's design.

Her name was Madam Naidu.

Sarojini Naidu was then in her early thirties. She had a classic Oriental beauty, and her costly sari, her jewels, spoke for her position as a lady of high rank and great wealth. She was a friend of Gokhale's, and she had earlier planned to meet Gandhi's ship, though she was unable at the last moment to do so. Today she had spent the best part of a half-hour wandering about in what

to her ' seemed an obscure part of Kensington,' before she found ' Gandhi's lodgings – in an unfashionable old house, with steep steps lighted by one lamp on the wall,' as she later told her club members. She reached at last ' an open doorway, framing a living picture of a little man with shaven head, seated on the floor on a black prison blanket, eating a messy meal of squashed tomatoes and olive oil, round him ranged some battered tins of parched ground-nuts and tasteless biscuits of dried plantain flour.'

She found it impossible to restrain her laughter ' at the amusing and unexpected vision.' Gokhale had described Gandhi as ' a man who makes heroes out of clay,' as victor over Smuts himself ' in a war for the labourer, who has no other friend.' Neither hero nor crusader however was revealed in the droll tiny figure before her.

He himself looked up, laughing in response, as he said, ' Ah. You must be Madam Naidu. Come in and share my meal.'

' No thanks,' she returned. ' What an abominable mess it is! '

He laughed again. And as she had her servant give him the parcel she had brought, he continued eating his meal. She explained that the ' cut pieces will be finished if you have them sewn for us by someone.' He promised to do this. He seemed wholly unembarrassed, as if his appearance, her amusement, his illness also, were immaterial, as if only the outfits for his men were of moment.

And as she spoke with him, she knew that her whole concept of the small, droll man changed. His spirit, not his appearance, mattered. When she left that day, there had already begun a friendship between him and herself. It was to reshape her life, and to make history for both England and India.

In India, only one other woman shared the eminence of Sarojini Naidu's status – Annie Besant, the religious leader.

Annie Besant had been travelling of late in the United States, with a young protégé of almost unearthly beauty, Krishnamurti, whom she had persuaded her Theosophical Society over all the world to accept as reincarnation of a Hindu god. The young man himself had however presently refused to admit that divinity was within him, then unexpectedly declared his intention to remain in California when Mrs. Besant prepared to continue on to Ireland on her way back to India. She nonethe-

less still calmly affirmed his quality of godhood as she said farewell.

She was now in Ireland, which was ablaze with the furore of Home Rule; she had been made the subject of laughter in newspapers of all civilized countries, during the Krishnamurti affair, but with her old gift for brushing aside whatever was embarrassing, she lost herself in the Irish movement, if not as a participant, as a deeply absorbed observer who did not hesitate to express indignation and condemnation toward these persons who were opposing the Empire, in the hour of a new war. Every word she made public was treasured as the utterance of divinity by her followers, and indeed by many millions in India who, though not formally associated with her movement, paid her profound reverence.

Sarojini Naidu, as did everyone in India, knew the name of Annie Besant and her work in establishing, more than two decades ago, the famous college at Benares, where even little girls had been admitted. But unlike the religious leader, her own interests were in home, children, and husband, and after these, in her writing. She was internationally celebrated as a poet.

To Gandhi she was no less strange than he to her. To his wife, she was a revelation, as a woman of their own people.

Sarojini Naidu was born in 1879, but she might well have lived in another century from Kasturbai Gandhi. Her father, a cosmopolitan, had brushed aside tradition to study medicine in Germany; he became physician to the Nizam of Hyderabad, perhaps the richest potentate on earth. The girl's parents were both Bengali Brahmins, of ancient lineage, yet their daughter was educated by the best tutors and, at twelve, matriculated in the University of Madras, an unprecedented step. Next, she was sent for further study to King's College in London, on a scholarship provided by the Nizam himself. But it was not only for education that her parents wished her to go abroad. She had fallen in love with a medical student – Govidurhajuli Naidu – who, though also of a fine old family, was a member of the Bania, or third caste. His people opposed a marriage between the two young lovers no less unyieldingly than did Sarojini's own father – there must be no marriage outside the caste, both families pronounced.

Sarojini was sixteen when she went to London. A drawing of

her shows a delicate beauty, the eyes astonishingly large, a face mirroring gentleness and purity. She did her work at college with great distinction, but she revealed more than brilliance as student. She began to write poems, of genuine literary distinction. Literary leaders of Victorian London learned of her. Gosse, Symons, Hardy, Beardsley, Le Gallienne, Havelock Ellis, even Henry James, gathered about the gifted child. Wilde made epigrams about her. Arthur Symons compared her eyes to deep pools. A quarter of a century earlier, Annie Besant had been admired by all London, and ten years later Olive Schreiner conquered the city. But Sarojini was neither crusader nor revolutionist. She was a deeply believing daughter of India, following convention as a matter of ingrained belief.

She seemed the very portrait of Eastern women, to the men who met her. In his introduction to a book she later was to publish, Arthur Symons rhapsodized:

She dressed always in clinging dresses of Eastern silk . . . She was so small, with her long hair which hung straight down her back you might have taken her for a child. She spoke little and in a low voice, and always wherever she was she seemed to be alone. All the life of the tiny figure seemed to concentrate in the eyes.

Never have I known anyone who seemed to subsist on such large draughts of intellectuality as this child of seventeen to whom one could tell one's troubles and agitations as to a wise old woman, for in the East maturity comes early, the child has already lived through all a woman's life.

Pain and pleasure transported her and the whole of pain and pleasure might be held in a flower's cup or in the imagined form of a friend. She has humour also, it was part of her strange wisdom.

There was something wise in her, purely personal, which belonged to a consciousness older than the Christian, her passionate tranquillity of mind, before which everything mean and trivial and temporary caught fire and burnt away.

To the extraordinary woman-child, Symons gave devoted friendship. She in turn confided that she was 'afraid of the beautiful wordly women of the West,' that she nonetheless

profoundly admired them. Loving England, she wrote verses, on the pattern of English poets. She showed her poetry to Symons, and later to Gosse; both urged her to continue, but to make use of her native literature, and her experience as 'daughter of India.'

After graduating from King's College, she was sent to Girton, Cambridge. Her father was determined to keep her away from home so long as she believed herself in love with young Naidu. In 1898 her health broke, and she left England to tour Italy. She continued on, to India; and there – to the scandal of Hyderabad – she married Naidu.

She bore him four children in five years. She thought herself supremely happy. To Symons she wrote: 'I have taught myself to become commonplace, like everyone else, superficially.' But to be commonplace and like everyone else, among the women of Hyderabad, was impossible for her. In 1903 she sent Symons a thin sheaf of verses. Many of them were to her youngsters – Jayasurya who was four, his sister Padmayaya who was three, Radheera, the 'Little Lord of Battle,' aged two, and the baby girl Lilamani. One of the poems was to her husband. Entitled 'Indian Love Song,' it began:

Like the serpent to the calling of flutes

Glides my heart unto thy fingers, O my love!

The imagery and feeling were Oriental now, no longer reflections of Tennyson and Wordsworth. The last lines read,

Lie still, O Love, until the morning sows

Her tents of gold on fields of ivory!

This was a poet who wrote in language unlike that of Miss Barrett's sonnets. Symons was overwhelmed by the growth of her gifts as writer. What made her work the more remarkable to him was the fact that it was in English, and part of it had been done when she was a girl of seventeen at King's College.

Symons pleaded with her to let him find a publisher; he wrote an introduction, giving the poet's life and using an enchanting portrait of her. The book was published in 1905, and made her famous. Edition followed edition; it was presently translated into Sarojini Naidu's own language and created a sensation in India as it had in England. When in 1905 she was invited, as a distinguished poet, to address a meeting of the All-India Social Conference, it was an honour that had been accorded to only one other woman in her country – Annie Besant.

Mrs. Besant was then preaching the doctrine that India must find herself, must move forward to a place among nations as equal with all, must affirm faith in the ancient Hinduism. Sarojini Naidu, aged twenty-six, chose for her address a plea for greater understanding between her people and the Empire, that greater unity might result between them. Her education was English; her book was in English; English friends had encouraged her to write, had helped her find in her own land the subject for writing. She loved England, as she did India.

In 1912 she sent the manuscript of a second book to Edmund Gosse. He found a publisher at once, and wrote the introduction to the book. He extolled its craftsmanship, but even more the author's gift 'of expressing emotions tropical and primitive, the emotions of her people.' Again, she used English for her poems. As in her first book, she spoke for the young wives and mothers of India.

She was acknowledged not only as a genius in her craft, but as the voice of all women in her land. An invitation was given to her to become a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. This was her reason for being in London in 1914.

Friends she met were waging a campaign for women's suffrage. Because she had long been troubled by the women imprisoned in *zenana* – seclusion – she felt there might be in the English movement some element that she might persuade Gokhale to have the powerful Indian Congress sponsor, in order to bring at least a measure of freedom to millions of women who were not as fortunate as herself. But when war broke out she left the suffrage movement at once to volunteer work in the British cause.

It was in this way that she came to meet Gandhi, who by a different path had attained the same attitude she held regarding the relationship of India to Britain. Gokhale, their mutual friend, although leader of the Congress party, whose programme from its inception had been to obtain the rights of India, was as much a friend of England as of his country.

After the uniforms for Gandhi's ambulance unit were completed, Madam Naidu continued to call on him and Kasturbai, with others of the Indian group. It thrilled her, she confessed, 'that men of all nations – Eastern and Western – gathered in

his home, proof that true greatness speaks in a universal language and compels universal admiration.'

That there was greatness in Gandhi, she had seen for herself since meeting him. All that Gokhale said of him was confirmed. He spoke with utter simplicity of what he had done before; vanity was not in him. In workman's shirt and trousers, he received in the same manner superbly arrayed millionaires, penniless students, stiffly correct British officers, or the class he had begun training for work in his corps.

The sparkling, beautiful woman would look now and again toward his wife. She thought Kasturbai 'a kindly gentle lady, with the indomitable spirit of a martyr.' It touched her that Kasturbai moved about, 'busy at a hundred small housewifely tasks, like any ordinary woman, and not the heroine of a martyrdom.' Perhaps for the first time one who admired Gandhi appreciated his wife also. The famous writer's feeling toward her became a combination of protectiveness and of respect due an older person. Between them arose a friendship based on the bond uniting two women who were Hindu wives, Hindu mothers.

But Gandhi's cold worsened so suddenly that a doctor was called, though against his wishes. It was imperative that he leave London, if he were to recover; he had been suffering, not from a cold, but from pleurisy. He resigned himself to abandoning plans for taking a unit to the front. Gokhale, who had finally returned to London and then gone back to India in October, arranged for him to meet the new Viceroy, at Bombay.

From Bombay, which he reached in January 1915, Gandhi went to Poona to see Gokhale and then to Rajkot, and his brother's house. Laxmidas, the ever-generous, did not censure him for abandoning all responsibility toward maintenance of the household.

For Kasturbai, life bloomed again in her familiar environment. The two youngest boys came to her. Manilal was in South Africa with Polak; Harilal had gone to another city with his wife and children, in order to put as great a distance as possible between his father and himself. He never forgave Gandhi for refusing him an education.

His father closed his mind to the young man's hatred. But it was apparent that Gandhi was on the verge of collapse. The

long years in South Africa at last demanded their toll. Gokhale persuaded him to spend a whole year in rest, meditation, and study of India, before assuming duties with the Indian Congress. At a place near the Sabarmati River, Gandhi established a small ashram, or retreat. Unwillingly enough, Kasturbai left Rajkot to join him there.

The friendship with Sarojini Naidu was renewed on beginning life again in their motherland. Gandhi was too ill to see people; but the distinguished poet did not forget them, and she kept them informed about herself.

Gandhi's other famous writer friend – Olive Schreiner – returned to London shortly after he left. She came with her brother Will, her husband remaining in South Africa. The war stunned her, as pacifist. When the Allies began to suffer defeat after defeat and country followed country in what was proving to be a world holocaust, she sought out Lloyd George, to plead for peaceful adjustment of international differences. Because of her name and Boer background she was at once dubbed pro-German. The unhappy woman, deserted by her friends, knew herself to be 'too sick to participate in public affairs further.' She hid away in a side street, emerging only once – to attend the cremation ceremonies of Edith Ellis, who died insane.

Annie Besant was back in India. She bought a newspaper, renamed it *New India*, and began a blistering attack on all those who opposed the British Empire. Sarojini was also proving – even in public – that she was a firm and loyal subject of Great Britain. Her country's leading body, the Indian National Congress, had declared a truce during the period of war, with the Allies fighting for the life of Britain. Even those who had been most virulent toward continuance of British rule obeyed the truce. Sarojini Naidu herself, however, offered her services as one who loved England. In Hyderabad, she organized food relief programmes, supervised collection of contributions to the British people. But she found time to write a poem, *The Broken Wing*, which she showed to Gokhale.

He asked her smiling: 'What does a songbird, like you, know of broken wings?'

She had been learning of it, she could reply. Their people called her 'The Nightingale of India.' But, through Gandhi, she had found there were women, gentle and beloved, like

herself, who were prepared to suffer martyrdom, who had been forced to endure martyrdom. Her own way of thinking and of living had been changed through knowledge of these women.

Gandhi was known to few in India; many of those who had heard of him believed him only a crackpot, a well-meaning man who had thrown away his brilliant career to follow a whim. Others, like Annie Besant, whom Sarojini knew well, did not hesitate to call Gandhi a dangerous man who preached law-breaking and was a menace to India.

Gokhale continued serenely to make plans for the part which Gandhi would be given presently in the Congress, as soon as he was well enough to begin work.

Then, suddenly, Gokhale, the great scholar and leader, died. Gandhi though still not strong, attended the funeral rites in Poona. When he returned he wore the scalp lock as he had done before leaving for London in 1887, at which time he had shaved it off. From now on he meant to identify himself even in outward appearance with his people.

The death of their mutual friend drew Sarojini Naidu and Gandhi into a closer friendship, through shared sorrow.

No sooner was the revered leader gone than Mrs. Besant herself swung about to a completely changed policy in her newspapers. It was as if she had only been waiting for Gokhale to die. The Congress, leaderless, seemed unable to realize what was happening. Annie Besant, however, moved with hard clear purpose, toward a goal she had already set herself. In her newspaper, published in Madras, Leadbeater without warning opened a series of scorching attacks – not on Britains' enemies, but on the British Empire itself. The attacks were based on England's treatment of India in the war.

There was abundant cause for excoriation. India had been all but wholly deprived of arms. The role assigned her, through the duration of war, was to serve as granary to the Empire. Moderates saw that the agreement of a truce was kept. But able leaders seethed when refused opportunity to take part in the military programme. Other nations, smaller than India, were being accepted as Allies. India remained only a source of food and of funds through taxation.

Thoughtful men did not protest when Mrs. Besant, the fiery old woman of nearly seventy, cried out through her paper

against the use of India as 'slave labour,' and as land without the rights accorded to all men, rights which were stated to be the purpose for which war was being waged. Nevertheless, when the National Congress met in December 1915 for its annual sessions cautious voices warned that it was well to remain calm. Mrs. Besant's violent protests were not endorsed officially.

Gandhi also attended the sessions. His voice was given no heed. Mrs. Besant had already organized a Home-Rule League for India, with branches over the entire country. She travelled to every city and village, held meetings, gave addresses, wrote editorials, collected large contributions. Gandhi said to a friend: 'There seems not a cottage in the country where Mrs. Besant's Home-Rule League is unknown.'

The British saw that she must be silenced, if India was not to be whipped into frenzy. She was interned, together with an old pundit who was her colleague. When she was released, Madras received her with music, banners, triumphal arches, pictures of her everywhere. She had no need to preach her doctrine. Her very presence spoke for her, everywhere she went. The militant Indian leaders knew that she was, without need of the title, their head. When she heard Gandhi's name mentioned, she remembered how she disliked him, how much she disapproved of his method of settling Indian grievances in Natal and Transvaal.

Nevertheless, when in February 1916 she held the ceremonies that celebrated the expansion of her college at Benares into the Hindoo University Central College, she sent him an invitation to attend. He came in the Khatiawar costume, as if to have his garments speak for him, as native Indian.

He listened as rajahs and nabobs expressed praise of the college programmes. After a maharajah who had contributed heavily to the college had spoken, Gandhi arose to address the meeting in his quiet, rather colourless voice: 'I compare the millions of the poor. And I feel like saying to these noblemen, there is no salvation for India, unless you strip yourselves of this jewellery and the silken garments such as women wear and hold it in trust for your countrymen of India.'

He continued, a straight, unvarnished speech, making it pitilessly clear that he believed Indians could only save themselves as Indians, not as make-believe Englishmen or by making

obeisance to their own wealth. The audience protested indignantly.

Finally, from the platform, Annie Besant ordered: 'Please, stop it!' Others, in the audience, called: 'Sit down! Keep still – sit down!'

He left, but he knew he would not keep silent. Though it meant the end of all hope to work with the Congress, he would not be silenced. For he had found a task to do in India, although there was none for him right now with the Congress, now that Gokhale was lost.

At the annual meeting held in December 1916 he now met Motilal Nehru, the famed lawyer and close associate of Gokhale. Nehru had been cool to Gandhi, though he introduced him to his young son, Jawaharlal. The boy, with his graceful figure and head of Greek beauty, was immediately attracted to Gandhi. Only with his own sons could Gandhi never establish friendship. But there had been another young man also presented to him, an Untouchable, who had followed the South African leader about until at last he was asked what he wanted. He pleaded, 'Come to my village, please come.' And, because there was no other at the Congress who wanted to speak or see him, Gandhi left with the young man.

Gandhi discovered a tragedy involving fifteen thousand peasants, who formerly had been required to plant indigo and give the harvest to their landlords, but now, because a substitute was lately invented for indigo, were told that they must make cash payment in lieu of the crops which could not be sold. The annual income of peasant families was twenty-five dollars. They were confronted with ruin, now.

Gandhi offered them his legal services. He was immediately arrested, for 'making a nuisance' of himself. But he won their case.

With Gokhale gone, there had seemed no task for him, but he found one that must be undertaken. As he had battled for the rights of indentured labourers in South Africa, so would he fight for the peasant of India. His work had only begun. It would be a campaign again waged by *Satyagraha*.

The ashram was moved, to a place across the river from Ahmedabad – where, as practical Bania, he knew support could be obtained for a 'public task,' for the city was a rich textile

centre. He began to plan his programme. There must first be found a way to supplement the earnings of peasants, who during part of every year starved because it was impossible to plant the land without rains. He felt that spinning would be the best way to earn the needed additional income. Textiles from India had once sold in world markets, with silks, bombazines, organzas being in demand even in China, Russia, South America. But since the industrial revolution British manufacture had wiped out the ancient native craft, and fabrics were imported by merchants for use in India.

The art of spinning must be revived.

Education in sanitation must be initiated also, to prevent the appalling loss of life, particularly among children.

Immediately, Gandhi put his own family to work on his programme. Devadas, the youngest lad, was given a class. Kasturbai was told sharply that she 'could tell cleanliness in a hut well enough' to instruct the woman there how to attain it. Against her will, as usual, she did what he demanded of her. This was not a crusade in which she was involved.

For the first time in her life she crossed the threshold of a pariah's dwelling. She tried to point out what needed washing – the children, the dirty pots, the unspeakable bedding. The poor woman listening eyed Kasturbai's white sari and spotless blouse, then asked, would the lady understand that this rag she wore was *her* sole clothing? That the rags on the floor were all the bedding owned, even in winter cold? That there was never enough to replenish what was broken or used up? That the children were always hungry because there was never enough to eat?

Kasturbai's heart opened. Here too was a woman's cause, she saw. She entered upon it, with devotion. Gandhi had forced her to reach the 'ideal' which he held for her, as his wife. From their friend, Sarojini Naidu, came aid. She did not herself leave the mansion which was her husband's home, but she saw that Gandhi's work became known among her friends. A young doctor offered his services, in simple medical care for the villagers about Gandhi's ashram. A fine young man named Desai came to be a member. Another, Pyeralal, followed.

A third book – *The Broken Wing* – was published by Sarojini

Naidu. There was a poem entitled 'Weavers' which spoke for the ancient ideal of women:

Weavers, weaving on break of day,
Why do you weave a garment so gay?
Blue as the wing of a halcyon wild,
We weave the robes of a new-born child.

In brilliant images from the folklore of her people, she sang of the women who wove garments for the bride, for the lad attaining his Sacred Thread and for those carried to the funeral pyre at last. But in her preface, she said:

During the radiant far off yesterdays of our history, it was the sacred duty of our womanhood to kindle and sustain the fires of hearth and altar, to light the beacon lights, and we are today again awake and profoundly aware of our splendid destiny.

It was a poet of the Orient who spoke, but she spoke as a woman. And yet, even as an Oriental woman, she looked beyond her home, her husband and children. It was to her people, as well as to those near to her, that her duty lay. A feminism broader in implication than that which she had discovered in London was revealed in her words.

In her new book Sarojini dedicated one poem to Gokhale, one to the Nizam who had been her friend in girlhood, one to her husband, and one to Gandhi.

She had come to think of him as 'one who lived out Christ's sermon on the Mount, a man who is literally a son of God.'

15

GUNGABEHN, ANASUYA SARABHAI AND KASTURBAI

WHAT GANDHI WANTED most was to begin the teaching of spinning to the villagers. But he could not find one spinning wheel, so obsolete had the craft become.

At a meeting over which he was presiding one day he happened to notice a woman of Kasturbai's age, and strange by

her very presence in the audience of men. Sturdy and alert, she moved about freely when food was served, 'showing,' as Gandhi said to himself, 'none of the curse of Untouchability' toward the peasants whom he had been addressing.

He asked about her. Her name was Gungabehn Majmundar. She was a widow, fairly well-to-do, and she 'went about everywhere without escort,' he was told.

Gandhi made a point of meeting her. She had little education of any kind, but possessed intelligence, enthusiasm, great energy. When he mentioned his vain search for a spinning wheel she promised to his joy that she would find one, and even someone to show her how to use it. It took time. But she finally discovered a wheel, and came to tell him that she had been shown how to spin on it.

Immediately, he put her to work teaching the peasants how to spin. In many huts she found ancient discarded wheels. Peasant women asked her eagerly if it would be possible, after learning their use, to find buyers for the spun yarn. She assured them that Gandhi could do this. She became a member of his ashram. Soon a steady stream of peasant wives were pouring to her from the village huts. She hired carders, taught ashram boys to make slivers in order to save their cost; somehow she obtained raw cotton in Bombay, despite the shortages of war; she found weavers, who showed her how to work with spun cotton on a loom.

Gandhi beamed: 'To see Gungabehn, at her loom, is a stirring sight!'

Out of a plain, ignorant Gujarati woman, he was making a pioneer in a new era. Through her, a tiny craft, a miniature industry, was being born.

Although he had never completely recovered since his serious illness in London, he would not continue his periods of daily rest, but became one of her pupils and learned to spin. He nagged at Kasturbai until she also learned; she proved a quick pupil, and became the best spinner at the ashram. Everyone was made to learn spinning and weaving, in order to help Gungabehn in her teaching, and also to help make cloth, which was given to the peasants for their use.

Gandhi cast aside his own good Kathiawar shirt and dhoti and declared that henceforward he would wear only the khadi

or homespun as clothing. He was certain that others would follow, that a market would open for the fabric which peasants about Sabarmati Ashram were weaving. As in South Africa Olive Schreiner had befriended his work at his ashrams, so now in India Sarojini Naidu was his gracious and understanding friend. Her richly clad little figure, which seemed much taller than it was because of her regal bearing, often appeared at the ashram, and usually she came with some friend, whom she showed the strange new cloth Gandhi was having spun. It seemed 'new' cloth though it was of course only the revival of the olden fabric which once was made by the poor.

Kasturbai, at her wheel, was jealous of Gungabehn as she had been of Sonya Schlesin and of Millie Polak. Now it was the widow who worked with Gandhi all day through. Yet Kasturbai was never troubled by Sarojini Naidu. The distinguished writer, although a fashionable and very beautiful woman, was her friend as well as Gandhi's. This friendship remained firm.

The true loyalty which Madam Naidu gave Gandhi was offered him by Gungabehn, on her own level of understanding. To her, as to Sonya, and even to Olive Schreiner and Sarojini Naidu, Gandhi revealed himself in the same light – as one who followed an ideal, expecting others to be equal to working with him, for his ideal. From each alike he received in response a deep, responding devotion, a devotion not only for his purposes, but to himself, the small and almost drolly ugly man.

Outside those loyal to him, he was regarded as a crackpot, who had thrown away a brilliant career. His *Satyagraha* programme seemed nonsense in the dreadful months of defeat which were befalling the Allies now. It was preposterous, even to the Congress members who knew that he had been a protégé of Gokhale's, to have him crouch over a spinning wheel, like some old crone. His communal home, in which he was called Bapu by all, seemed a dangerous absurdity. At the old city of Ahmedabad, near which he had his ashram, there was a rich Hindu community, many of the residents Banias like himself. To these people it was unforgiveable that all rules of caste were disregarded at the ashram – Banias, warriors, Brahmins mingling without differences respected. It was unbelievable in the eyes of pious men that Gandhi's wife should do work

designated by their tenets only to pariah servants or low-caste washermen.

(Kasturbai herself had taken up this matter in her brief respite at Rajkot. The wife of Laxmidas had however assured her that, since a husband was responsible for what his wife did, and since her duty above all others was to obey him, such sin as existed was Gandhi's. She must merely accept what he demanded, and comply, therefore.)

To be sure, her husband no longer believed that 'a wife must dance attendance on the husband,' as Hindu faith ordained. But he still insisted on his own way, astonishing though it might be. He had her called 'Ba' by all the ashram, for example. She accepted this, but secretly it galled her a little. 'Ba' was the endearing name for Mother. She felt motherly enough, certainly, to the ashramites. But really there were only her own sons whose mother she could feel herself to be.

Not far from the ashram was a textile mill, owned by a rich Bania, Ambalal Sarabhai. Kasturbai could see for herself how differently the women in the millowner's house lived. They were his wife Sarladevi and his sister, a spinster, Anasuya, who ruled the house like a queen.

Occasionally Anasuya would come, as did many now, to take a look at the ashram. She contributed amply to the khadi work. When a strike broke out in her brothers' plant, she told Gandhi of her indignation. She felt that the workers had just grievances; her brother would not admit that any existed. Gandhi entered upon a fast – as his mother used to do long ago in order to find some spiritual basis for solution of her problem. This was *Satyagraha*, applied to an industrial and domestic conflict.

At once Anasuya declared: 'If you fast, I fast also. It was I who got you into this business!' Gandhi persuaded her, and others among the strikers, not to fast. Nonetheless Ambalal was dismayed. He at once agreed to the terms Gandhi proposed for settlement of the strike – higher wages, less hours. The difference between brother and sister was settled with the settlement of the labour problem. So impressed was Anasuya that she promptly became a follower of Gandhi. She came into his ashram membership; she was to remain his faithful disciple to her death.

Even her brother acknowledged the value of Gandhi's policy of *Satyagraha*. He too became a supporter of the khadi work. As

in South Africa, men of widely varied backgrounds and callings were drawn – slowly, to be sure – about Mohandas Gandhi, and his strange programme. One man was a millionaire lawyer named Patel, an ironic, learned scholar, who soon became a devout defender of Gandhi and was to be his associate to the end of life. Through new friends, Gandhi's hope that the homespun would become known was – if only in small degree – being realized. Sarojini Naidu's friends used the rough fabrics as a quaint contrast to their fragile, embroidered silks and painted chiffons. Bankers, dressmakers, importers became aware of a native material made at Sabarmati Ashram. 'Khadi' became a word in the vocabulary of India.

It pleased Gandhi more than all else that he was proving that the peasant needed 'not help – but self-help.' Had he not battled with Kasturbai and their children to accept this teaching, even in Natal, years ago?

In December 1917, he attended the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress. He was barely noticed. Annie Besant was elected president for the year of 1918. She came forth to the dais, her white sari over her snowy hair, and stood, magnificent in the beauty of her seventy years, to receive the homage shouted by many thousands, delegates from all India, greeting her as their new leader. She, a woman, a foreigner, headed the highest body of the land. Never in the history of the country had this been dreamed of; yet it was reality, and she was the successor to Gokhale himself.

Gandhi, lost in the multitude, left to return to his ashram, to begin work again in the spinning programme. Apparently the task which Gokhale had given him hope he would be assigned to do was beyond expectation now. Annie Besant mocked all that he believed and did, all that he had done. Though since her release from prison, she no longer had been vocal and violent concerning the British Empire, her disdain of Gandhi had not abated.

The Crown, which was suffering frightening defeats, offered India a promise that Dominion status would be granted, as reward for continuing the supply of food for the British and the manufacture of certain needed products in Indian factories. Statehood would therefore be attained, without resort to arms. It was, curiously enough, a sort of adaption of Gandhi's own

programme of winning victories through use of nonviolence, as in his South African days. But he was not included in the body of leaders with whom Britain dealt in India. He was brushed aside, forgotten.

In South Africa his newspaper still remained alive, a vital force. Manilal was helping to put out *Indian Opinion*. Despite the young man's former indignation concerning the lack of university training, Gandhi could congratulate himself upon the success of his method in preparing Manilal for a career, though the eldest son, Harilal, remained unforgiving, indeed bitterly inimical.

Manilal had arrived in 1916 from South Africa on a visit. He had not seen his parents for several years. He had given up the woman he loved, at his father's behest; but he had neither resentment nor bitterness. He was only happy to be with his parents for a time.

Gandhi, however, immediately drafted him into ashram work; he was sent to Calcutta on an errand, with ashram funds. There by chance he met Harilal. The elder brother poured out his heart to Manilal. He told of the years in which he had been struggling to earn a living, at one endeavour after another and always with failure. He could never forgive their father for denying him the opportunity to follow a profession. Now, however, there was an opening which he had found, and if he had the money – if he could only obtain a small loan – he would be able to start on something which would, after all, support his wife and four little children.

The younger brother was overwhelmed. He agreed to 'lend' the money he was carrying. When Kasturbai heard of it, at the ashram, she tried to keep it a secret from his father. But that proved impossible. Then Gandhi discovered what had happened; he could not calm himself. Manilal was told that he was 'worthy only to follow the basest occupation,' that he 'must never appear again,' that he was a criminal who had committed the ultimate evil of 'appropriating public funds for private use.'

Kasturbai was not permitted to protest, to defend. She remembered of course that her husband, when he was young and newly married to her, had stolen and lied, had bought meat, smoked tobacco. His father forgave all, however. Gandhi

himself refused to show mercy to his son. He would accept from his sons, as from herself, no less than perfection.

The name of Harilal was anathema now.

Yet when influenza broke out in India, as it did all over the world, and Harilal's wife died in the epidemic, Gandhi had the children brought to the ashram to be placed under their grandmother's care. To be sure, Kasturbai had work enough, and this was an added task. But for Gandhi added work could not count. One accepted duties which must be done.

Small though the orphaned children were, they were given tasks to do, and were taught spinning of khadi like the other youngsters. To their grandfather they became one of life's deepest joys. He forgot that he was supposed to love all little folks in the same way and the same degree, but this was typical of the fact that he had never thought it necessary to remain unalterably consistent with what he had formerly believed or done. One grew, he said, changing as 'truth' was revealed more clearly, stage by stage.

His ashram knew of this ability to adapt and change. Nevertheless, it could not but astonish friends and detractors both when early in 1918 he offered his services to recruit for the British. He had always believed utterly in the value of the British Constitution. He realized now that the Empire was struggling to survive; Indian military aid was fundamental for its survival.

As he arose to address a group in one of the villages, he collapsed; it was necessary to take him home to the ashram. He had apparently caught a form of influenza. So emaciated did he become, that the doctor ordered milk as sole diet for a time. Gandhi would not hear of it. Had he not promised himself never to touch any food of, or from, the cow?

By his bed stood Kasturbai, her face pinched with anxiety. She said, hesitantly, 'Surely though, you cannot have objection to *goat's* milk, Mohana?' Her artless wisdom found what he was obliged to admit as 'truth.' The goat's milk saved his life. But convalescence was slow. He could not even sit up at the spinning wheel. That fretted him as much as did his illness.

Those who were amused by his spinning did not understand his reasons. To the peasants, he – an aristocrat, a lawyer – gave dignity and value to their own resumption of an abandoned

craft, by his participation in it. He knew that it was necessary for him to encourage the growth of this craft in every way. Through it, he and Gungabehn Majmundar had already opened the gateway to new hope for a living income in the pitiful lives of the peasants of India, whether Mrs. Besant and her friends acknowledged it or not.

16

VIJAYA LAKSHMI NEHRU

MAHADEV DESAI, one of the ashramites who had become **M**as a son to Gandhi, brought to his sickbed news that Germany had surrendered; recruiting was no longer necessary. India had sent over a million and a quarter men to the Allied forces, had bought three quarters of a million dollars of war bonds, had contributed a half billion in supplies. Dominion status had been promised by the Empire, as reward.

But shortly there appeared a report by the Rowlatt Committee which had been appointed to plan for post-war action in India. The report suggested harshly restrictive measures – including trial without jury or by secret jury, prohibition of public assembly, strict watch over those suspected of ‘spreading propaganda.’ Returning veterans stated that, however gallant Indians were in action, commissions had not been granted to them. Munition workers returned to town and village to find themselves treated, as they always had been, with dismissive disdain.

The Rowlatt Report brought post-war India to boiling indignation.

Gandhi dictated to Desai a letter protesting against the recommendations proposed, pleading that they should not be made into law. His letter and appeal, like those of others, was received with indifference. In March 1919 the Rowlatt Act were passed.

He at once called to his ashram a number of friends, one of them a woman – Sarojini Naidu. They knew that the law was a betrayal of their country’s faith. It discredited them before the

world, it was an insult to the people. But what action to take, they did not see. They parted, with hearts full.

That night, in a dream, there came to Gandhi a plan, to propose a *hartal* – complete cessation of activity of all kind. It was, of course, a form of *Satyagraha*. Through it India could speak to the world, without a word. His plan was at once agreed upon, as an inspiration. Suddenly, he who had been outside most of the accepted leadership of the country, who had incurred dislike from Mrs. Besant, Congress president, found himself the centre of a swiftly growing following. There was little time to wait; his plan must be made known as rapidly as possible to every village, town, and city.

Gandhi set out on a tour of the whole land; and in his entourage was Sarojini Naidu. She was now forty-two; her elder son was twenty-two, his sisters twenty-one and nineteen, his brother twenty. She had no demanding duties to keep her at home as mother. She put aside her writing and the responsibilities of her task as wife in a great mansion to speak to the women of India against the Rowlatt Act.

On 6 April a parade was held in Bombay, the marchers gathering at a mosque to hear Gandhi speak. Ali Jinnah, a brilliant, voluble Mohammedan lawyer, had joined with him. It was strange enough that Hindus and Moslems met in the same place of worship, but stranger was it when a woman, Sarojini Naidu, came forward to address that multitude of men.

Her friend Motilal Nehru sent his limousine to fetch Gandhi. He was driven up a road which wound through badminton and tennis courts and gardens bright with pomegranate palms and hibiscus; he crossed a terrace opening into a book-lined study, where Nehru waited. Dinner was served, not in the dining room furnished after the European fashion, but – in deference to Gandhi – on a cloth spread upon the inlaid floor. Madam Nehru was present. Her elder daughter – Vijaya Lakshmi, whom Motilal Nehru had taken to the Indian National Congress at its 1915 sessions – came in. She was a young girl of nineteen, and with such perfect Kashmir beauty that her nickname since childhood had been ‘Beauty.’ A small sister, Krishna, vivid and charming, came also, and young Jawaharlal Nehru, who had been Gandhi’s friend since meeting him at Lucknow in 1916.

It was of his son that Motilal Nehru spoke. He explained that he wished to tell Gandhi, personally, that although earlier he had been unsympathetic to the *Satyagraha* programme, he was withdrawing all objections; he gave his son full permission to join those forming a group which was to present the *hartal* plan to India.

The little daughter broke in: 'Why don't you wish us to fight the British, Mr. Gandhi?' Her father until now had believed Mrs. Besant to be right, that home rule should be won by any means.

Very simply, her father's guest explained what non-violence implied. It was not passive acquiescence to evil and evil-doers, not passive resistance, but an aggressive 'yet non-violent method' of resisting those who wished to do ill.

He himself later confessed that he could not understand how his party did it, but when the day of *hartal* came there was 'not a village or city from one end of the land to the other' which had not been addressed. He had composed a pledge to be accepted; everywhere he and his group spoke, the people promised to keep this pledge. He had even sent a copy of it to the country's press late in February. There was nothing secret about what was being done.

The day of the *hartal* was to be 6 April 1919. Dawn broke. And every store, school, mill, university, every river boat, all public works, all ships in port, seemed suddenly to be inhabited by the dead. Brahmin and pariah, men and women, fasted and prayed the twenty-four hours through. The police arrested those gathering in the streets, wounding a number, even killing some. Gandhi was arrested quickly, for 'instigating' the pledges to follow his *hartal* plan.

His arrest seemed to set India aflame. Riots flared; many now were killed, thousands were critically wounded.

Mrs. Besant, who had been prompt in condemnation of the *hartal*, could now point to the folly of Gandhi's *Satyagraha*. He himself was terming it 'a Himalayan miscalculation,' and the press took up the phrase. He felt now that the people were not yet trained sufficiently in the methods of civil disobedience; they had not learned non-violence.

Terror had only begun. At the ashram, Kasturbai saw one woman member arrested; in Ahmedabad telephone wires and

rails were being torn away. In the holy city of Amritsar, in the Punjab, as Gandhi learned only weeks later, twenty thousand had gathered in a walled public garden. There burst in a regiment of soldiers led by General Dyer, who ordered his men to shoot. The unarmed multitude could not escape; there was only one small exit to the place. Over three hundred and seventy were killed, and more than a thousand left wounded on the ground. Dyer had only that day ordered placards to be posted, forbidding public assemblies; the people, wholly unarmed, had not as yet heard of the order.

Unbelievably, Mrs. Besant condoned Dyer, as acting wisely in time of tension. All the former worship and adoration shown her was – in an instant of time – wholly erased. She was after all a foreigner, a partisan of the Empire policy. A crowd at Amritsar attacked an English girl, a missionary, and Dyer inflicted a bestial punishment: at the place where she was beaten, everyone passing must crawl by, on all fours, with flogging for disobedience. Women living in purdah had their garments stripped off and were publicly whipped.

For the first time, Gandhi saw that British reaction was not a reflection of mere 'local colour prejudice.' It was the *Empire's* prejudice. 'Political freedom is our only real hope.' There must be a war waged, to win India's independence. As it had been necessary to introduce *Indian Opinion* to educate his people in South Africa, so now he began publication of a newspaper in the motherland, calling it *Young India* as a symbolic name. Tagore, Jinnah, young Nehru, Sarojini Naidu, all contributed to it. It became the voice that spoke to India for statehood, and which spoke for India itself.

Mohandas Gandhi was leader of the country.

Mrs. Besant, who only a few months earlier had been adulated as president of the Indian National Congress, said wonderingly: 'I lost my popularity, by opposing Gandhi.' In May she left for London, only her Theosophical Society members bidding her farewell. Her day as leader of her adopted land was over.

Sarojini Naidu also went to London, to present the Amritsar tragedy there. On 3 June she addressed a public meeting at Kingsley Hall – a settlement house founded by a feminist leader, Muriel Lester. Sarojini Naidu's voice broke as she cried out:

‘ My sisters were stripped, they were flogged, they were outraged! ’ Newspapers demanded that the Government state whether her charge was true. The answer was: ‘ It is, of course, not true.’

To her, however, an explanation was given: ‘ You must distinguish between the police and martial law.’ She would accept no such distinction.

Over ensuing months, all the way into the spring of 1920, she attended meetings of the House of Commons, to hear what was said concerning her country. Early in 1920 she wrote to Gandhi:

It is vain to expect justice from a race so blind and drunk with power . . . The debate in the House of Commons last week shattered the last remnants of my hope and faith in British justice and good will toward the new vision of India. The discussion in the House was tragic . . . They see only members of the coloured race . . . unworthy to govern themselves as do other nations of the world.

No longer could she consider herself a ‘ moderate ’ toward the Empire. When she returned to India she spoke with a new voice. It was an eloquent voice, no longer shy.

Gandhi had decided to begin war for political freedom by presenting *khadi*. She accompanied him on this mission, as she had to help preach *hartal*, before. She spoke with eloquence, drawing her figures of speech from the legends and scriptures of her country. She spoke to the women, as another woman. In her coarse homespun gown, she pleaded that they buy and use *khadi* cloth. Money was needed for looms, spinning wheels and raw cotton, to be used by the villagers in the industry begun with Gangabehn Majmundar’s aid. Buying native homespun ensured economic freedom to the villagers, as first step in the economic war against the Empire’s power.

Presently, Gandhi himself spoke to audiences of women. From behind screens and curtains they listened to his rather flat, singsong voice. He did not attempt to stir or uplift; he gave facts and asked very simply for sacrifice on the basis of his facts. He asked only what he expected of himself – and as from himself, he expected no less than the best to be offered.

He wanted the women of India to sacrifice the most precious of their earthly belongings, their pearls and sapphires, their rich

wedding feasts, their lovely garments. He told them: 'We are a nation at war, and in time of war there is no excuse for such foolishness.' And to aid him, who led the war of *Satyagraha* for their country's independence, they gave their bracelets, golden waistbands, their necklaces, their jewelled rings for ears and nose and toes. They even tried to wear khadi cloth, to help the peasants find a way of livelihood. The poorest contributed what they could; Gandhi believed they must not be denied this privilege. It was estimated that 100,000 rupees were contributed by peasants in one year, through the sacrifice of the women in village huts.

Sarojini Naidu taught the women of India feminism, by opening to them a way of warring, in their closed homes, for Indian statehood.

In December 1920 Olive Schreiner died. Her passing left a hole in Gandhi's life, though he had not met her for years. But as she had been the friend of his work in Transvaal, so now was Sarojini Naidu his friend in India. She was more than a friend; she was a sister, a daughter. She described herself as his 'loving, loyal, devoted disciple to the end of life.'

Occasionally, when he was not well, Kasturbai would accompany his speaking party. She would sit, a small, silent figure, clearly not understanding political or economic issues involved in the talks, but it was plain that she understood the human issues. Sarojini Naidu was the voice of Indian womanhood, but Gandhi's wife might well have served as the symbol of the women whom Gandhi and Sarojini addressed.

Kasturbai did not pretend to share Gandhi's public work. But she understood him as her husband, as man. At the ashram, in her tiny hut apart from his, she rose before dawn, because he did; she prayed with the ashram members gathering about him, then went back to fold her mattresses and blankets and after that folded his in his hut. He bathed, then walked with members of the ashram for a time; she took her bath when he went out to walk. She had charge of all the kitchens in the ashram; she cooked for twenty people in her own kitchen. The members knew how strict was 'Ba's' authority. A friend of Gandhi's, Ramchandran, has described her:

She is a little imperious lady with flashing eyes, whose voice can be sharp at times. Though she can be very

sweet if she chooses, she can also be harsh and unbending . . . She rules her part of the ashram, which included Gandhi's cottage, with a steel hand.

She is not educated in the familiar sense of the word but has her own ability . . . Her guileless simplicity conquered me, it also conquers her husband. It is evident that her life is centred on him, though it is known that he has taken a vow of celibacy with her.

Pyarelal Nayyar, one of Gandhi's two secretaries, was a Brahmin, a university graduate; he had never lifted a finger in menial tasks before he joined the ashram. Kasturbai made him understand, as soon as he appeared, that he was expected to pull his weight like the rest. He was never to forget how hard a taskmaster she was during his early months. *Kasturba* – Mother Kasturbai – was the name given her now. She had become accustomed to being called 'Ba,' even enjoyed it. But she was a sternly strict little mother, the ashramites knew.

One day, Pyarelal's own mother came to the ashram. With her was his twelve-year-old sister, Sushila. Madam Nayyar had come firmly determined to demand that Gandhi sent her son home. She had never ceased grieving since he joined Gandhi. Their family was not only Brahmin in caste but had also a distinguished record in the Government service, not an easy accomplishment for Indian people. Pyarelal had been trained to enter Government service, and now, instead, he served Gandhi as secretary, wore rough homespun instead of London dress, slept on the floor, ate coarse food.

Gandhi was absent, when Madam Nayyar arrived at the ashram. Kasturba took her and small Sushila in charge. She heard out Madam Nayyar's worries and complaints, intended for Gandhi himself. She spoke to her, presently, of her own experiences as Gandhi's wife. She told of the days in Natal, in Transvaal. She tried to make Madam Nayyar, who was a woman of her own kind and nearly of her own age, understand what it had meant to follow Gandhi's dream and share his plans. What she wished to do was to show the mother of Pyarelal that even she – Kasturba Gandhi – had chosen to follow the lead of a man who himself followed a vision. Surely, Pyarelal was right therefore in following Gandhi also?

Gandhi did not appear until late in the evening. He daunted

the mother and her daughter alike. He teased the woman: ' You are wearing costly foreign fabrics. It is vanity, for a child particularly.' The mother and daughter both were tongue-tied, embarrassed ' in an atmosphere too rarefied to breathe.' They left for home, and Kasturba accompanied them part way to the gates.

At home, Madam Nayyar confided to her daughter: ' I love Madam Gandhi.' So also said the child. They spoke of what she had told them of her life in South Africa. Madam Nayyar thought her ' a saint, one who has a wonderful loyalty to a man, a woman of unrivalled readiness to endure danger and suffering for him.' Surely, Pyarelal was as safe with her as he would be at home with his own mother.

The plan to have him sent back home was set aside. Thus even in the ashram programme Kasturba had been of use; insofar as she could be. She had saved Pyarelal for her husband, simply by speaking honestly and movingly, of her own self.

In the same way, she filled her part of the ashram programme and her duties as one of the members expected to share in teaching of villagers. As from the start, she did such teaching as she could, not by words, but by the example she showed through the work of her hands. She taught Untouchables how to spin, how to prepare their scraps of food, how to spread fresh cow-dung on their earthen floors, how to keep their miserable little huts as clean as could be managed.

And for her husband she took responsibility to see that he ate what he should, and that he did not collapse from overwork, or did not neglect an illness when it came. Ramchandran wrote:

He has a will of iron . . . gentle but inflexible. The nearer one is to him the sterner is his discipline. People shrink from opposing him because they trust him more than themselves . . . But there is one who opposes him, for his own good, his wife.

Toward Gandhi the ashram members felt as towards a gentle father. Yet to his own sons, Kasturba still saw him show only inflexible authority. Manilal was an exile in South Africa; he had never been forgiven for the loan made to Harilal. Harilal himself had abandoned his ancestral faith, had taken the name of Abdulla. He ran about with prostitutes, lounged at street corners, sent incoherent letters to the press signed ' Abdulla,'

mocking, berating Gandhi. Vaishnavas held honour toward parents a sacred duty, essential to salvation in later lives. Kasturba's heart was broken by her son, yet she took care of his motherless children. But her husband would have no word of extenuation spoken about Harilal. And she accepted this, however it wounded her.

When Gandhi received into the ashram an Untouchable family, Ahmedabad contributors stopped sending money for his work. It seemed that Sabarmati Ashram must be abandoned; but he would not send the Untouchables away. In what seemed a miracle, there was left a bag holding thirteen thousand rupees, by a man who did not even give his name. The ashram was saved. Now Gandhi announced that he meant to adopt the Untouchable's seven-year-old child, Lakshmi. Appalled, Kasturba declared that she would never consent to this. He retorted: 'Will you receive the sweeper's girl as our child, and with love?' He had bullied her long ago in Natal, and she had yielded at last; now she agreed to take as daughter the child of pariahs, because he was bent upon it.

Lakshmi was taken into her cottage, and presently into her heart. Her husband once more compelled his wife to rise to his own ideals. But, unknowingly, she herself taught him also. She taught him to see women in another light, and it was through her that he came step by step to discover a new way of regarding the women of whom she was the symbol. He wrote one day in *Young India*:

The saying attributed to Manu that for woman there can be no freedom is to me not sacrosanct. I cannot subscribe to the tenet that the wife should ever treat the husband as God, though he be characterless, sensual, devoid of good.

He believed that 'if *Ahimsa* means infinite love, capacity for suffering, who but woman, the mother of man, shows this capacity in largest measure?' Nonetheless, his wife retained her spirited pride as of old. Her husband could not even invade her domain at the ashram.

Ramchandran was witness to one incident. Gandhi had a habit of inviting co-workers when it suited him, asking them to remain for supper at his wish. Kasturba had gone to rest, after making her kitchen immaculate. Gandhi poked his head into

the kitchen, whispering to the lad who was finishing odds and ends of chores: ' Could a meal be prepared, without waking her? Guests have come - '

He slipped in, helped light fires, cut vegetables, kneaded bread, all in silence. Down rattled a brass platter. Instantly Kasturba flew out, to demand, ' What is it? ' She scolded: ' You think I cannot do the extra work? ' She took things in hand, and supper was ready at the proper time. She received the visitors with the courtesy of a Bania lady. But when they left she faced Gandhi to ask: ' Why did you tell the boy to work, without me? Do you think I'm such a lazy-bones? '

Twinkling, he said: ' Don't you know, Ba, I'm afraid of you at such times? '

' You? ' she gasped. ' Afraid of me? '

' It's true, ' he assured her. ' If I am afraid of anyone, I am a wee bit afraid of you. ' Even his friends wondered sometimes if in his heart he did not feel guilt toward her. He had asked of her more than most women would give - had taken away the privilege of caste, of a sheltered home, of near relationship with her sons.

He said of her one day: ' Such discipline in nonviolence as I have had, was given at home, by my wife. I used to be a tryant, but my tyranny was the tyranny of love. ' He had never ceased forcing her to reach toward the height he wanted her to attain. But she had no reason to feel small; life had given her a spiritual training that made her greater now than she realized.

17

VIJAYA LAKSHMI NEHRU, SAROJINI NAIDU AND KASTURBAI

ONE AFTERNOON in May 1921, Motilal Nehru's limousine drove up to the ashram; the distinguished lawyer stepped out, not in London dress but in khadi cloth. He came to discuss with Gandhi the proposed visit which was to be made by the Prince of Wales, a thoroughly engaging young man, for whom

the maharajahs already were arranging processions, entertainments, and superb durbars. It was of course hoped by the Empire that his stay would erase, or at least diminish, the opposition that had been aroused when the promise of granting dominion status to India had not been kept.

Gandhi himself set to work, drafting a series of resolutions for presentation at the annual meeting of the Congress that December. It was also necessary to make known over the whole country what must be done by the people when the Prince of Wales came. There must be a 'non-co-operation programme' followed throughout his stay.

Gandhi met an audience of fifty thousand at Madras. In his unhurried and unoratical voice, he asked the listeners 'to boycott parades and festivities completely.' That was the procedure advised at all meetings before which Madam Naidu, Nehru and Gandhi spoke. When the Government warned that those attending such meetings would be arrested, an organization calling itself 'Young Volunteers' formed, published a list of its members, and declared its readiness to be arrested. The young people persuaded merchants to make bonfires of British products, particularly textiles as a sign of loyalty to India's khadi. Arrests followed, by the hundreds.

Sarojini Naidu addressed a great multitude, advising them: 'Do not co-operate with the authorities, remain indoors, do nothing beyond that.' They were to show no slightest violence, however, when the Prince came, she stressed. At the close of her talk she pointed to a table on which lay books by Gandhi, for sale, and explained: 'You are liable to arrest if you buy or sell them.' The audience surged forward to buy, and Young Volunteers hurried toward them to sell, the books.

11 November was the date announced for the Prince's arrival in Bombay. Before that riots had already broken out. Gandhi undertook a five-day fast until the disturbances ended, guarding against a repetition of the tragedy of Amritsar. Order was somewhat restored.

On the appointed day the twenty-seven-year-old Prince – handsome, charming, gay as had been his grandfather Edward the Seventh – entered Bombay with a splendid retinue. Rajahs, with miles of accompanying entourage, princes borne on elephants caparisoned with blazing jewels and priceless silks and

brocades met the eldest son of the King and Emperor. The procession of native potentates and their royal guest moved into the streets of Bombay.

The streets through which they passed were almost deserted.

The people were obeying Gandhi's instructions. He had staked his honour, and the future of India, on *Satyagraha*. This time, he did not fail.

Many of the Congress leaders were arrested. Motilal Nehru and his son received two years each. Madam Naidu and Nehru's daughter, Vijaya Lakshmi, were to be sent to the women's prison for a year. By the time the Congress met at Ahmedabad in December twenty thousand Indians were in prisons. The Congress elected Gandhi its 'sole executive authority.' Resolutions he had drafted were adopted unanimously, one by one:

To surrender all titles and honours and honorary offices granted by the Empire.

To refuse attendance at durbars and ceremonies.

To withdraw gradually all students and pupils from Government schools.

To boycott, gradually, British courts and to establish private arbitration courts.

To have soldiers, clerks, labourers, refuse service in Mesopotamia.

To boycott all foreign made goods.

To plan for admission of Untouchables in public work, and in places of worship.

Motilal Nehru himself had asked that *swaraj* – independent statehood – be made the first objective of the Congress, through Gandhi's plan of 'war.' Tagore resigned the knighthood which had been granted him. Gandhi returned the medals he had received for war work in South Africa.

The British had been debating what to do about him. Finally on 10 March, 1922, Gandhi was arrested – with deference – on the charge of writing seditious articles in *Young India*.

The day of his trial – by then Motilal Nehru and his son were also in the prison – arrived. Sarojini Naidu was brought for her trial as well. Gandhi walked in between guards, a bony little man in shirt and loincloth; every man in the room rose as he entered.

His arrest had established him further as the undisputed

leader of his land. Out of India's own people had arisen one who spoke with their voice, who shared their suffering as one of themselves.

He heard himself charged with treason, 'with disaffection and inciting non-co-operation with His Majesty's Government.'

At the back of the court, Kasturba sat listening. She had been bringing him fruit juices, to keep the spark of life from going out, during his waiting for the trial. He, like Motilal Nehru and Madam Naidu, Jawaharlal Nehru and his sister, pleaded 'no defence.' Gandhi said, as was repeated in the press:

I hold it to be a virtue to be disaffected toward a Government which in its totality has done more harm to India than any previous system.

He spoke for his own part as leader of protests against this system:

My public career began in 1893 in South Africa when I discovered I had no rights, because I was Indian . . . Yet when the existence of the Empire was threatened by the Boers, I raised a volunteer ambulance corps . . . and in 1906 during the Zulu Revolt I raised a stretcher-bearer party . . . I received medals . . . I organized another volunteer corps in 1914 . . . My first shock came, on reading the Rowlatt Act . . . I was horrified when the Amritsar floggings were ordered, the belly orders, and other indescribable humiliations . . . Now, I know there will not be fulfilled the plighted word of Lloyd George . . . I can only say that I knew what I must do, and I have done it . . . Punish me to the fullest severity of the law . . . I have been the leader in all that has been done.

He was sentenced to six years of prison. They, and others who had been arrested and sentenced also, were led out between guards.

As Gandhi passed through, people fell on their knees before him.

Kasturba, sitting at the back of the room, saw him leave. No longer would she be permitted to bring him food, nor even to see him except on the monthly visit permitted his friends. The women were held in an institution of the 'A' class, which had no murderers or prostitutes; they were living amongst thieves

and common scolds only. Vijaya Lakshmi Nehru and Sarojini Naidu, who had known such luxury as India made possible to those of great wealth, were thrust for the first time in their lives into daily contact with Indian womanhood at the lowest common level. Like the men, they could be permitted to write only one letter a month, or to have one caller monthly instead. These rules were very rigidly enforced, especially with Gandhi.

His imprisonment made him a god in India, overnight. The Indian people gave him a new name: *Mahatma*, 'Great Soul.' He did not at the time even know this.

He began writing, in his cell, the story of his life, *My Search for Truth*. Interwoven with his life was that of Kasturba, since their marriage day in childhood. He remembered that in the early years:

I used to let loose my anger on her. I had a notion it was her duty to obey me, her lord and master, in everything. I literally made life a hell for her, changed my residence, prescribed her dress, forced her, brought up in an orthodox family where Untouchability was practised, to accept Moslems and Untouchables in her husband's home. And I made her serve them, regardless of her abhorrence . . . Her unresisting meekness opened my eyes. It began slowly to dawn on me that I had no such prescriptive rights over her, and if I wanted her obedience, I had to persuade her by patient argument, and she thus became my teacher in *Satyagraha*, nonviolence.

Apparently he wished to believe this. They were fifty-two years old, married all but forty years, and they now had grandchildren.

For *Young India*, he wrote just before his imprisonment a disclaimer to assertions of some unknown girl that she was his natural daughter:

Except for a tiny Untouchable girl I do proudly call my adopted daughter, I have none . . . This child has brought happiness to me, she believes in all play and no work . . . I do not mind the charming idler of seven years claiming me as father . . . I feel as father to all the young girls of India.

In his autobiography he stated that no other woman 'could

ever supersede' his wife, that she 'would always attract me, as no other ever would or could,' that although what he 'sought for' she could not comprehend, he knew 'if I desire it, she does also.' She remained the one woman he loved. In her own way, too, she had achieved unity with him.

He became very ill in prison. Kasturba was permitted to bring him fruit and vegetable juices, as his health deteriorated dangerously. In January 1924 he developed acute appendicitis. An emergency operation was performed one night, another prisoner holding the candle which gave light to the surgeon. The operation was successful, but his convalescence was long. Authorities were glad to have a reason for sending him home. By long care, his wife brought him slowly back to a semblance of health.

But he had already become a historic figure.

He was compared to Lincoln, Zoroaster, Buddha, Mohammed, even to Jesus. In world parliaments, his programme of boycott was discussed as a new political technique, never proposed before, and yet serving admirably in India. A British magazine published an article, 'Gandhi - King of India.' Another headed a piece about him, 'Gandhi - Indian Saint.' Even in England there was an astonished respect for him. The *New Statesman* published, in the same issue with a story on the royal family illustrated by portraits of Queen Mother Alexandra and the King's sons, an account of the Indian khadi programme, and of a conference between Gandhi and Lord Reading, who conceded that Gandhi was 'a man of great distinction.' With the article was used a portrait of Gandhi; beside him, was Kasturba. Through her husband she had, all unknowingly, become a world figure. In their land she was the wife of a man worshipped almost as divinity.

18

MURIEL LESTER AND MADELEINE SLADE

IN 1923 Annie Besant – approaching eighty, author of almost four hundred books and pamphlets – composed an outline for a constitution to be used in India, and took it to London, where, with her old skill, she managed to have it introduced before the House of Commons. But it died in committee. Outside her organization her name was hardly known in postwar Europe and, when mentioned at all, she was usually presented as an amusing old soul who still attempted to force Krishnamurti upon her followers as a deity, though he himself insisted he was a wholly mortal young man. But, though Mrs. Besant's influence had waned, a number of persons in England were sincerely troubled by the Indian problem and sympathetic to the new leader who was waging a 'war without violence' to gain his people's independence. One of these English people was Muriel Lester, head of Kingsley Hall ('the Hull House of London'), where early in 1920 Sarojini Naidu had made her public address on the Amritsar tragedy.

In France, Romain Rolland, by no means a religious mystic, wrote a book about Gandhi, though he had never met him. He called him 'the Saint Paul of our generation.' It was as 'Mahatma' that he pictured him, as saint and almost god. In the United States the legend of Mohandas Gandhi grew into a story that was sometimes quaintly amusing but almost equally touching and believable. *Good Housekeeping* – a popular monthly magazine for women – published his portrait; he wore burnoose and cap, the scraggly moustache was prominent. Beside him was Kasturba in white sari, her feet bare, the caste mark painted on her forehead. The text spoke of her as 'a lovely, gentle, tragic figure.' Her husband's face however seemed much older than hers. With teeth half-gone, and cheeks hollow, he looked the ascetic he had become.

Muriel Lester read Rolland's book *Mahatma Gandhi* when it

appeared in 1924. Tagore's son-in-law had been urging her to come for a stay at the ashram; this she now arranged to do. She arrived on a beautiful October day, to find Gandhi with a garland about his shoulders, which the children had placed there in celebration of his birthday. There was a gay midday meal, Gandhi showing his visitor how to squat comfortably on the floor beside him. Kasturba saw to it that the food – vegetables, nuts, fruits and goat's milk, with no salt, sugar or condiments as seasoning – was not disregarded by Gandhi.

After supper, he went for a walk, young ashram maidens clustering about him on either side. There were prayers and hymns sung later; then at ten all left for their huts, to be awakened at dawn next morning, when the day's work would begin again. Muriel Lester was invited to see Gandhi in his study, a low room with no furniture other than a small bench, a little stool, and an eighteen-inch-high desk for writing. He told her to use 'the stool as more comfortable for an Englishwoman than to squat. Then he answered the questions she put him, concerning sanitation work for villages, war without violence, khadi work. Deep laughter occasionally punctuated his talk; at times he answered with a smile in lieu of words. He spoke with utmost frankness as if he expected to find in his listener a friend. He was, as she had been told, very ugly; but there was an irresistible magnetism in the man, sitting all but naked, every rib showing in the small bony frame.

When she left, she knew that she was his friend. Muriel Lester could be useful to him. In her group at home were some of the leading figures of England; Churchill's cousin, Clare Sheridan, the sculptor, was an intimate friend; she knew Lloyd George, and Horace Alexander, and Bernard Shaw. Her settlement house, Kingsley Hall, was itself a famous institution. Those whom she had heard call Gandhi 'fanatical' did not, she realized, understand his character, in which there was not a trace of bitterness, of anger, no least resentment, even when he spoke wholly frankly of his intention to continue fighting until India won statehood.

She promised herself that one day she would return, to live at his ashram for a time.

His standards for the ashramites had become more stern. Husband and wife, if they insisted, could occupy the same hut;

but they must not cohabit. To a young couple who asked his blessing upon their marriage, he said: 'May you have no children.'

He could be grim about small, what seemed even petty, things. He was unrelenting concerning punctuality. He saved scraps of paper, bits of pencil. There must be no waste, as he saw it, no waste of a moment of time, of anything however little that could be of use and thus save the cost of purchase. Nevertheless, for most of the ashramites he had almost the status of divinity, though, as Kasturba was Ba, so was he Bapu to the mixed family of over two hundred – including a leper who had formerly been a university professor, a musician, a Jewish engineer, artists, business executives, merchants, and a considerable number of women who came from high-caste families as well as out of Untouchable villages. There was a foundling, and a millionaire, Bajaj, who lived at the ashram with his wife and who regarded Gandhi not only as a father, but as a god.

Ashram maidens and women vied to perform tasks for the Mahatma. It was the duty of Kasturba, as official 'Head of Women's Activities' in Sabarmati Ashram, to apportion work for female members. This one she permitted to carry food to Gandhi, that one to bring back his dishes, a third was allowed to run an errand for him. Kasturba herself always prepared everything he ate. Occasionally she would stroll over to see whether he had eaten all, and if not – why not.

There were women disciples of his who, though they did not live at the ashram, gave him their full devotion. Among these was Vijaya Lakshmi, who had married Ranjit Sitaram Pandit in 1921. Pandit was a brilliant young barrister, classicist, historian, and a Gandhi follower, whom she had met through Mahadev Desai, one of Gandhi's secretaries. Krishna, the younger sister of Madam Pandit, was now one of Gandhi's devoted adherents also.

He made no secret of the pleasure he took in the companionship of young maidens and women, who surrounded him after meals or on his walks. They in turn gave him a sweet, wholly sexless affection, confiding to him their secrets, as long ago his first secretary, Miss Dick, had done in Johannesburg. He prided himself on having not the least desire for women carnally,

declaring that his celibacy created toward all women a purity of feeling which in his youth he had not felt.

Nevertheless, he would not himself permit the attributes of saintliness to be accorded him. He detested the name 'Mahatma' which was fastened upon him. He told one reporter almost tartly: 'I do not talk with God. I only use common sense, while listening to the voice of conscience.' Though his loincloth had become a subject, seemingly, of international interest, he wore it neither as an exhibitionist nor one revealing 'other worldliness.' He was, as his wife and sons knew, incapable of mere sentimentality. There were logical reasons for the loincloth, just as there were for the spinning wheel.

It was pragmatism that kept him at his spinning wheel for an hour daily. His example encouraged the peasants to follow suit. In a single year India imported \$25,000,000 worth of cheap textiles from Japan and England. He meant to have these funds spent in India itself, to augment the starvation incomes of the peasants. He wore the loincloth of the pariah to express thereby, very graphically, the economic status of India's poorest, whom his programme of 'homespun for India' aimed to aid.

A programme, for him, had meaning when it was made alive through action. At the college in Benares, where Mrs. Besant had revolutionized education in India, Gandhi arranged that any student refusing to study with Untouchables in the same class should be dismissed. Rajahs were appalled; but the poor saw only clearer proof of their leader's godhood.

Nevertheless there were others, besides Mrs. Besant, who refused him homage. Ali Jinnah, once Gandhi's co-worker and friend, had established a Moslem League as rival of the Indian National Congress which Gandhi headed. Whether from envy or from pride on behalf of people of his own faith, Jinnah strove to undermine Gandhi and to further Moslem status in the country thereby. Only Gandhi's eldest son, Harilal, equalled the Mohammedan in hatred toward the little man in his loincloth. A London magazine published a picture of Gandhi, in loincloth, to illustrate an article headed, 'The Crisis In India,' which explained that his 'non-violence programme' in opposition to the Government was unacceptable to many in his country, particularly to the new, powerful Moslem League, 'saint' though he might be to some of his people.

But for every detractor there was a new adherent. It seemed unimportant, at the time, when he received a letter from an Englishwoman who knew Muriel Lester. She wrote that she wished to come to his ashram, not for a brief visit, but as a permanent member. The letter was signed 'Madeleine Slade.'

Gandhi pictured her as a young girl carried away by some ephemeral enthusiasm, and his reply told her that life was hard at Sabarmati Ashram, that she should take time to consider her request, 'and if after a time you still wish to come, write again.' She sent him twenty pounds as contribution to the ashram; he spent it on the khadi work, and wrote her a brief line of thanks. He was more preoccupied than usual, for there were serious matters calling upon his thought just then.

One of these was a resurgence of difficulties among South African Indians. He himself, because of ill health, could not go there. It was decided that Sarojini Naidu should sail in his stead, to survey the crisis there and see what could be done.

In his personal life, though he consistently refused to admit he had a personal life, Gandhi faced a crisis also. Manilal wished to get married. Could a suitable girl be found, in India? It was years since the scandal in which he was involved had taken place, and Gandhi had finally forgiven his son. Manilal was doing good work on *Indian Opinion*, justifying his father's decision that university education was not indispensable as preparation for a career, though Harilal on his part never forgave this deprivation.

To Bajaj, the millionaire member of the ashram, was given the task of finding a suitable bride for Manilal.

Meanwhile, another letter arrived from Miss Slade. She still wanted to come to the ashram. Gandhi dictated a note, advising her how to prepare for ashram life, if she wished to share it. She must learn how to spin, how to speak Hindu, she must become accustomed to sleeping on the floor, wearing rough garments, eating only coarse, unseasoned vegetable food. If, after a year, she still felt she wanted to come, she was to write to him again, and he would receive her.

He had learned who Miss Slade was. She represented the high social caste of Great Britain, as truly as Sarojini Naidu and the daughters of Motilal Nehru symbolized that caste in India. Her father was Admiral Sir Edmund Slade, K.A.I.E., who at

twenty-four years of age already was captain of his own ship and later served Victoria in the Egyptian campaign of 1882. In the reign of Edward the Seventh he had been made commander-in-chief in the East Indies, but finally retired, to live on his laurels at his gracious country-house outside London.

Madeleine had been born there in 1892. At the time of her father's retirement, she was a tall child of fifteen, who loved music, sports, and manual tasks, though not permitted to indulge in the last weakness except in gardening. At eighteen, with a slender Tennysonian figure, six feet tall, a handsome young girl with a profusion of dark hair and fine eyes, she accompanied her father on a visit to the Governor of Bombay. They remained for some time there; she found herself much courted by the young attachés. She was never to forget that visit, and India, it seemed.

In London again, she became a 'society woman.' She was to tell an interviewer one day: 'I, and millions of girls like me, went to the same kind of parties, with the same kind of men. We went to hunts and on drives, riding the same kind of horses, living the same kind of life.' She seemed to 'find a frightful affectation, presently, in all – all was heavy, dull, the heavy food, the people with their sated appetites.'

There came the war; and then followed the peace.

Perhaps she did not realize it, but the peace was more tragic for some than had been the war itself. The high plateau of Rupert Brooke and his gallantry, his joyous sacrifice of life, seemed to crumble into the rubble of boredom, passive indifference. England realized a moral collapse, which was ascribed at least in part to the 'wasted lives of our women with leisure,' the two million 'excess women' left after war casualties. There was 'need for men' to 'solve the tragedy of surplus women,' it was frankly said by one magazine.

On both sides of the Atlantic, however, older minds were troubled by the social decay reflected in 'jazzomania.' An editor grieved over 'our sex-ridden young men and women.' Writers like D. H. Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield published books with titles mirroring the contemporary concepts of sexual morals.

Suffrage had been a burning issue. But in 1925 there were three hundred thousand women unemployed, in England, and

it was found that they had no wish to marry – that ‘ wifehood had become unpopular as a career to them.’ The question, ‘ Are women entitled to a career? ’ had been superseded by a new one: ‘ Are women entitled to the single standard? ’ The very symbol of the postwar generation was the group dancing about the Prince of Wales – laughing, debonair, rich, restless young people, often brilliantly gifted, often seeming to seek only escape from reality at any cost.

There was social change as well among the young of India, but of a very different sort. A British editor asked: ‘ Is Purdah Passing? ’ It was beginning to pass, and a few – a very few, to be sure – girls were studying medicine, social work, teaching, in American colleges. And there were those who had already chosen spinsterhood in lieu of love and children, to follow a duty toward their people, the duty of caring for the sick, the poor, the unlettered, whom Gandhi wished to have made equal with other peoples of the world.

Young women followers of his knew that it was their personal concern when a newspaper in England said:

The consent of India and the British people must be given to any new Constitution. We could leave India altogether, to stew in her own juice, withdraw our army and white administration . . . But except for a minute number of fanatics, that is not what the opposition really wants.

It was not what the rajahs, nor Ali Jinnah, now wanted. But among ‘ fanatics ’ working with Gandhi were young women who were not concerned with flight from postwar realities through sex and liquor but were accepting the need of suffering and sacrifice for a nation.

It was this reality which Madeleine Slade sought for herself. She wanted a nobility which she had not found in the life about her. It was in service to a saint, dedicating himself to a people, that she hoped to find meaning to her life. She had tried to seek meaning to life in one way after another, in enthusiasm after enthusiasm, ‘ getting a craze ’ for an idea and following it with another ‘ craze ’ for another idea. Her sister – wife of a Harley Street physician – and their charming mother, their dignified father, the large stately family as a whole, all watched her move from interest to interest, knowing she would eventually cherish

something further. In 1923 she dropped everything for a stay in Paris.

Purely by chance, she saw in a bookshop window there a copy of Rolland's new book. When she had read it, she knew, instantly, that she must become one of Gandhi's ashram family. Her people, hearing this, were certain it too would be only another 'craze' and run its course presently. They were amused when she told them she meant to spend a full year with some Swiss peasants, in preparation for arduous life at Gandhi's ashram. But the new 'craze' did not splutter out. Her family received word that she was not coming home. To their horror, she sailed for India in November 1925.

She had disregarded Gandhi's own letter, which said he wished 'not to frighten but to warn' her that the ashram regime was rigorous. A letter was sent to him from Marseilles, saying that she would be at Sabarmati Ashram in twelve days. Why she left England, she was never to tell. Her cousin remembered that she had had her 'fair share of admirers,' but that she 'seemed never at home' amidst the pursuits of her friends. There was a restlessness which never let her find peace and which drove her finally to India, to Sabarmati Ashram, to the Mahatma.

Desai and a few others from the ashram met her on the day she arrived.

There descended from the train, not a young girl, but a woman of thirty-three, a tall figure, and swathed in a khadi garment. They later learned that she had sent to Delhi for the homespun and had her London dressmaker make a long shapeless gown of it; aboard ship she burned her Paris dresses and stepped ashore in the garb of Gandhi women. Desai concealed what he thought, as he sighted her — dark hair framing a thin face in which brooded large dark eyes under a high forehead, the nose aquiline and imperious, the mouth very uncertain.

Desai, a man of handsome features and great charm and gentleness, greeted the stately Englishwoman. She put questions at once, as one accustomed to respect and authority. In her high English voice, with its clipped Oxford inflection, she asked, how far was the ashram, how long would it be before she came there? She was plainly under great stress; Desai only smiled in reply.

They crossed a bridge spanning Sabarmati River, rode past a field with workers busy; and in the distance was visible a small cluster of mud cottages. They neared a tamarind tree; a tiny path was crossed, to a verandah. Trembling, the Englishwoman stepped toward a door opening into a room. She followed Desai in.

A small thin man rose and walked toward her. She fell on her knees before Gandhi. He stooped to lift her tall figure. She towered a foot above him, but he held her as if she were a tall child, and said: 'You shall be my daughter.' It was what he said to other young women coming into ashram membership.

She was sent to Kasturba to be assigned tasks, a cottage and companions. Kasturba could see that the Englishwoman's hands were not those of a woman accustomed to work, and that if she had done such work, she had not done it long. What she thought of the new ashram member she did not say.

Madeleine Slade was given an ashram name, at her own wish, by Gandhi. She was to be called 'Mira' – after a mythical woman, one of India's greatest mystics – who, despite torture by her husband, a king, followed Krishna unswervingly, 'taking poison as if it were nectar, and the Lord of the Universe protected her.'

It was the gods – the faith – of India, whom the newcomer was to serve, her name implied. Madeleine Slade's membership in the ashram – as Gandhi could not but realize – meant an extraordinary opportunity to show unity between East and West. But from the first moment she saw him, it was plain that what she wanted was a purely personal relationship with him, her saint. She wanted it with an intensity which seemed rooted in fear, or desperation, or religious obsession.

Sarojini Naidu also had left her social group to live and work for his cause. But it was the cause to which she gave herself; he was its leader. Madeleine Slade – Mira – seemed unable to see anything but the man himself, though she saw him as a divinity, as did his humblest worshippers.

It was necessary for him to leave, almost as soon as she arrived, on a khadi tour. She became, as she admitted, 'literally sick,' when he went. She pursued him with letters, with bouquets of flowers that reached him dusty and dead. When he returned

from the villages, he did not hesitate to show her his annoyance. But she clung to him as if only in him were her life.

He left again, and her letters streamed to the village where he was speaking. He told her, briefly, that he had her mail, and added 'thanks.' In his kindness, he could not hurt her; he 'realized the pain' she had, but urged her to 'seek the highest truth only.' She did not change. She 'suffered excruciatingly' whenever he left the ashram; if he remained away for some time she broke down completely. This was to continue for years.

Never had he experienced this, for Kasturba had never forgotten her 'reticence,' and Gungabehn, Sonya Schlesin, Madam Naidu, Madam Pandit, all gave devotion to his *vision*, his *work*. He tried to find some task which would occupy the Englishwoman. He was revising his autobiography; to her was assigned its editing, for publication in America.

But a book could not fill his place for her. She did not seem to know what to do with herself. She had torn away from all her past. There was no other human being to whom she could cling except Gandhi, the saint and almost god.

A month after she came, the annual meeting of the Indian National Congress was scheduled. As usual, Gandhi went away, alone, to prepare himself spiritually for the conferences. Mira collapsed when he left. On his return, he sent her away to study Hindi, as preparation for teaching the peasants carding and spinning. A flood of letters came from her school. He sent a note: 'I am glad you wrote today. I miss you on my walks here.' Two days later he replied that he 'had all' her letters. Then in a week or so: 'I have all your love letters.'

Spiritual love was what he meant, needless to say. He added, with kindness: 'Watch everything. Mend what you can.' He wanted her to 'mend' that which was hysterical, frightened, in herself. He tried to make her see how harried he was by his duties: 'You will understand, and not unnecessarily agitate yourself,' he pleaded, with unconscious irritation.

He was indeed fully occupied. At the Indian National Congress to be held this month, he planned to make Sarojini Naidu president of the country's highest body.

19

SAROJINI NAIDU

WHEN ELECTED to the presidency of the Congress in 1924, Gandhi was given 'sole authority to name his successor.' He was now far from well; it was plain that he must have a rest. For the office he held, he presented Sarojini Naidu's name. Throughout India, not a woman in a hundred could read; child marriage, purdah, even, in remote areas of the country, suttee were still practised. But, by the wish of Mahatma Gandhi himself, a woman whose duties were those of wife and mother was to occupy his place.

It was the fortieth anniversary of the Indian National Congress, and not even the election of Mrs. Besant some years earlier could have been more astonishing to those who remembered the beginnings of the organization, for Sarojini was one of their own women, women who had no legal rights, who were chattels of husbands and fathers, or even of sons, if the husband died.

In the vast tent of hand-loomed cloth, an hour before proceedings even began, fifteen thousand delegates gathered, including in their membership students, politicians, arrogant rajahs of limitless wealth, and the new group representing Untouchables. Most had on their heads the now familiar 'Gandhi cap,' modelled after the one given Gandhi in prison at Natal; many wore khadi cloth. All of course squatted on the floor. The dais before them held only one chair, for Gandhi, who was not well enough to stand.

Behind grass screens sat a few women, hidden from the men; one was masked, with netting sewn over the eye-slits. They had been hearing Gandhi and Madam Naidu make appeals for the peasant work; some of them gave an hour daily to spinning, as Gandhi wished them to do.

There was a sound of drums. Cheers rang out. Gandhi came in, wearing only loincloth and sandals, as usual. Sarojini Naidu

followed with Motilal Nehru and his son, and then the Ali brothers who, though Moslems, were not adherents of Ali Jinnah and his Moslem League, but good friends and supporters of Gandhi.

Those assembled were aware that nomination of Madam Naidu was a dramatic thing, for more reasons than her sex. Ali Jinnah meant to supersede the Congress in power and as voice of the country in relation to the Empire. Thousands of the younger men – including even Jawaharlal Nehru, much though he revered Gandhi – were no longer in sympathy with the Mahatma. Among them many agnostics and Socialists, these men had no faith in his ‘victory through suffering’ doctrine; they could not swallow what they called his ‘mysticism.’ Things must move faster; there must be an ‘underground movement’ to arrange war with ammunition, such as Western people waged. These were things to be discussed at business sessions of the Congress.

All, however, rose in one united gesture of respect, as Madam Naidu appeared – not in a gold threaded sari, treasured over generations, nor in priceless jewels, but in a plain white khadi gown. Her once fragile figure had broadened, but she looked handsome, queenly, with her flashing eyes, her fine skin and beautiful dark hair. Accompanying her, was her eldest daughter, who travelled with her on all tours made with Gandhi; the other daughter was a student at Oxford. Although her husband, Dr. Naidu, was concerned about the heart ailment which was the consequence of her prison experiences, she showed no sign of illness.

Gandhi ascended the dais, taking the chair there. He began his introduction of the incoming president. He spoke of his years in South Africa, where he had experienced injustice and humiliation, as a member of a dark-skinned people. He recalled next the woman who had been ‘a loyal friend,’ who had ‘been one of the few making no distinction between her people and ours.’ Olive Schreiner had been dead exactly five years, this December day on which the Congress met. He placed her as a memory, before the great assemblage, to stand beside Sarojini Naidu, another woman of genius and courage.

Sarojini Naidu then gave her address, beginning:

I, who have rocked the cradle . . . I, who have sung

soft lullabies . . . I the emblem of Mother India, am now to kindle the flame of liberty . . . In electing me chief among you, through a period fraught with grave issues and fateful decisions, you have reverted to an old tradition and restore to Indian women the classic epoch of our country's history.

Although she spoke in English, she seemed indeed one of the ancient Indian women leaders celebrated in sacred myths and in legends. Her eloquent phrases, spoken with grandeur, were published over the world. Among all the nations, not one other had as yet granted women the high place given them, through Gandhi, in India. The *New York Times* saluted her as a 'Joan of Arc who rose to inspire India,' publishing a portrait of her in rich embroidered sari, jewelled necklaces, with a medallion on the shoulder, the dress of a Hindu social leader. She was described as 'the darling of Victorian English society,' as 'the first high-born Brahmin girl to break with the strict tradition of veil and caste . . . who returned home, and obtained the support of a progressive Nizam' in Gandhi's work, and 'by 1921 . . . was definitely a politician' in the leadership of her country.

They who observed her at the inaugural meeting did not see a skilled politician. True, she immediately took responsibility, as president, to direct committee conferences; with the others she squatted on the floor, and she was quick to rise to her knees, whenever a speaker wished to be recognized. If sharp disagreement arose, her rather heavy figure would turn instantly to quell the disturbers — chief of these being Ali Jinnah, impeccable in London dress, glib in speech, deft in thought and phrase, and ready to oppose anything Gandhi proposed.

The business sessions lasted eight hours; she did not show fatigue throughout. She pleaded, attacking Ali Jinnah at one point, with direct and fearless words:

Let the Congress be the voice of the people, not the voice of politicians . . . We have national, not purely personal purposes! How shall I kindle the flame which should waken men from slavery? Why not aspire to crescent honours, splendour, victories as vast as India herself? There are those amongst us who wish to be but cheap models of the West! Why are we not Indians — for India?

Her graceful hands moved in gestures of appeal, a lift of the eyebrow emphasizing an inflection, a turn of glance giving fuller meaning to a word. These were mannerisms of a great lady, taught since infancy to delight, to plead without speech; men realized the magic of her effortless charm.

But she did not succeed in persuading Gandhi's opponents that *Satyagraha* must remain the way to fight for statehood. She did not win Ali Jinnah to put aside his 'personal purposes' of winning victory over Gandhi, as head of the country.

It was noted that Gandhi and young Nehru sat on either side of her. Some whispered: 'She seems invariably to turn to these two, to hear what they say and advise.'

It was Gandhi's judgment that she trusted; it was his vision that she always had followed, since accepting him as her leader in 1914. She was only another voice, another pair of hands, to express what he believed and wished done. A journalist was to say of her, some years later:

In her home it is possible to learn more about Indian leaders and the party's inner politics . . . than could be learned in a month of arduous travel and interviews . . . whether about the Congress programme, or the Mahatma himself.

She fought for Gandhi, in every way she could find. In ensuing months, her battle for him gave her a strength she had not revealed earlier, as her speaking for *Satyagraha* had revealed in her an eloquence as speaker which she had not shown before.

She gave Gandhi the best of her mind, her physical strength, to further his vision, asking only the privilege of aiding him. It astonished her genuinely that he had designated her as his successor. She spoke of and to Gandhi, with undisguised reverence, but also with a charming, teasing lightness. She had not lost her wit over the years. 'My little old man,' she sometimes called him, with loving laughter. On a tour to raise funds for the khadi work, she sighed: 'It takes a great deal of money to keep Bapu living in poverty!' But she saw to it that her friends and her husband's friends helped provide that money. She gave her heart to Gandhi's life-task. Yet the centre of her existence was always her own home, her husband and children.

Mira, Madeleine Slade, seemed however to have no life except in her devotion to Gandhi. Her letters continued to

follow him, implore him, wherever he went. He wrote to her almost sharply, from a village where he had stopped on a khadi tour:

You are feeling the separation . . . But you will get over it, because it has to be got over . . . A few days of separation is a preparation for the longer life, that death brings . . . Death itself is a pleasant thing, another life.

His absences nevertheless continued to unnerve her, to the point of physical illness. She seemed unable to free herself from clinging to his presence.

In October 1926 Muriel Lester had returned, with her nephew, 'to settle down for a period of ashram life.' Somehow, she seemed unable to establish a friendly relationship with Gandhi, though he had been warm and hospitable on her earlier visit. Later, in her autobiography, she admitted how troubled she was. She cleaned, scrubbed, did laundry and scavenging, spun cloth. Yet she 'found it impossible to get to properly friendly terms with Gandhi himself, easily accessible though he was.'

Then one day she flatly contradicted him. He 'beamed, delightedly'; after that they were friends. He did not want abject devotion; he detested it. He wanted honest, courageous thinking, though perhaps with final acquiescence to his own thinking, as final objective. Dependence, in women as much as in men, denied what he believed fundamental: strength of mind and of character.

Mira, who was a friend of Muriel Lester's, drew from him increasingly harsh replies to her letters. He sent her this note:

Your letters. Also your wire. You must forget me in the body; merge yourself in your work.

He would not hear of her returning from the village where he had sent her to work:

You come daily in touch with me by doing my work as if it were your own . . . You have come to me for my ideals insofar as I live them.

He refused to have her accompany his party. Yet when she was at the ashram he did not deny her the happiness of serving him, as did the rest, since that was what she desired.

Europeans and Americans found it difficult to understand his

acceptance of abasement offered him by ashramites. An American woman, Patricia Kendall, wrote a book about him, describing his appearance, naked except for his loincloth, and sitting 'on a floor mat with his skeleton legs folded beside his thighs, the soles turned uppermost, while his hands are busy with a small spinning wheel,' and 'on either side of him secretaries who took down every word that fell from his lips,' while 'before him a woman knelt, in adoration.'

It seemed to her an unbelievable picture. She sketched in details, with acid:

Two small eyes flash at one, from above an enormous nose, and wide almost toothless mouth; the eyes of a strategist, the nose of a dictator, the mouth of a monologist. Huge pierced ears frame a brown face, and one thread of hair, the *shikha* by which all Hindus are lifted up to Heaven by their gods, protrudes from a close cropped head.

It was not a friendly hand which painted the portrait. The writer quoted him as telling her: 'In India, if one aspires to be a political leader, one must be a saint first.' Gandhi however had neither the naïveté nor the lack of common sense to have spoken these words. Even his enemies knew him to be completely sincere. He detested the conception of himself as saint. The *Philadelphia Public Ledger* said:

His sincerity cannot be called into question even by those he resisted. He is given credit for genuine consecration. Hindus feel he is a saint, a new martyr . . . He does not seem to be actuated by pride of place, by love of power that inspires other demagogues. Gandhi leads 400,000,000 people who follow him without reservation.

He expected no less consecration from those who followed him, women as well as men.

When Miss Kendall asked his opinion on child marriages he told her that he did not disapprove of them, since – if people loved one another – they would cease being a tragedy. In his own newspaper he had reported that there were over two hundred thousand widows below fifteen years of age; thirteen hundred were less than a year old, two thousand under two years, ten thousand not yet five years old. None of these children

could remarry. Over two hundred thousand child mothers were dying, annually, in giving birth. He said the ultimate solution was not in passing a law which forbade marriage of children, but in *Ahimsa* – in love.

The interviewer wondered about a weeping woman she had passed on entering. Gandhi explained that the woman had come to tell him of ‘an attack upon her by two Moslems,’ whom she had resisted violently, but in vain. She came to relate her shock, horror and shame. But he had reproved her; *Ahimsa* demanded non-resistance to *all* evil; only so could good conquer evil. He forgave her, however; when she left, her tears were happy ones, because of his forgiveness.

The American, unable to believe her ears, asked whether he would feel so about his own family. He replied that, were his beloved little adopted daughter, his adored granddaughters or even his wife attacked and ravished, he ‘would not interfere,’ knowing that God’s love would prevail.

To another American woman – Margaret Sanger – he said later that he could not recommend birth control as a cure for the death of child mothers, nor indeed for the problem of starving millions unable to earn a living. The one way to prevent death of child mothers and starvation of the people, was to teach continence in marriage. ‘Progeny alone is justification for any sexual gratification,’ he maintained, citing his own life with Kasturba.

Nehru and Sarojini Naidu did not agree with him upon this. But they, like all India, understood him, as aliens could not. Where love and ‘truth’ were, there could be no hurt, no injustice, no evil. Even tiny girls given to old men in marriage would be shielded by love, tenderness. And where love was, any child conceived would not suffer want and hunger and disease.

Nonetheless, despite his affirmation of equality between sexes and his choice of a woman to head all India, Gandhi was in no way disposed to alter the traditional marriage customs that required study of the stars in making the choice of a wife. To Mira he wrote in 1927 a cheerful, almost gay note, saying that he was on the train with Manilal, Kasturba, Desai, Ramdas, and Pandit, master of music at Sabarmati Ashram. They were on the way to Manilal’s wedding. Bajaj had consulted priests, had had horoscopes read and had come up with a very fine girl

as future wife of Manilal – Sushyla, daughter of a Bania, Mannabhai Mashruwali Akala. It was a first-rate match, agreed Gandhi. Manilal, who was thirty-five, accepted the choice without question, seemingly. Bajaj next had a propitious day selected for a wedding. Manilal agreed, obediently as before.

All was forgiven him. The wedding took place, Gandhi beaming throughout. It was a civil ceremony, there was no need of feasts, of music. There were no wedding gifts, though Gandhi gave his new daughter-in-law a Christian Bible as a present. She was plainly a sweet and gentle person, honest, thoughtful, pretty besides. At the railroad station, when they returned to the train to make their journey back homeward, Gandhi chuckled: 'Manilal! Do not sit in our compartment. Find your own place, and take Sushyla along!' It was, he added genially, 'an opportunity for husband and wife to become acquainted.'

One might have thought that the time was a half century earlier, and that old Dewan Gandhi was speaking. Yet the marriage had been celebrated without religious ceremonies, which would have been unthinkable to Manilal's grandfather.

Gandhi added, with delighted satisfaction that the wedding 'was of the simplest character,' 'no presents were accepted, no expense incurred.'

Although following immemorial tradition in choosing Manilal's wife, Gandhi brushed aside Kasturba's own desire, which of course was to have a splendid celebration, with relatives and friends gathered by the hundreds, and herself, the groom's mother, accorded a special part both during the ceremonies and in preparations preceding. Her eldest son had eloped; Manilal had no priests, no singers, at his wedding. His mother had not the happiness of putting his hand in that of his bride's, of tying his scarf to the girl's sari in symbol of their sacred union.

She was merely riding back home, in a second-class compartment. However, this in itself bespoke Gandhi's own joyousness. He usually refused to take any but third-class seats, because 'there must be the same treatment for all castes.' Yet, though he believed also in the rights of women, he did not seem to remember that Kasturba had the right to arrange a wedding for her son, according to her own beliefs and desires.

He also believed in full equality among all castes. Yet when

his youngest son, Devadas, fell in love next, he refused the young fellow permission to marry. His refusal was based on belief in division between the castes. The girl, because she was the daughter of Chakravarty Rajagopalachari, who had given up a successful law practice to follow Gandhi in the war without violence, suffered from a handicap which Gandhi would not condone in a daughter-in-law. Her father, to be sure, lived as an ascetic, ate only vegetable food, spent a half-hour daily at khadi work; he had been in prison with Gandhi. At an ashram he founded in Salem he supervised a leather-curing and shoe-factory project, which he had established to help Untouchables earn a livelihood. There seemed every reason that his daughter, Lakshmi, was a most desirable choice for Gandhi's son. But Gandhi would not hear of a marriage.

Her father was the leading Brahmin in his province. 'The Gandhis were Banias of the Vaisya, two castes lower. Gandhi would not allow the proscription against marriages outside castes to be disobeyed. He had never thought it necessary to be consistent, he said. He followed 'truth' wherever he found it; its meaning changed, from time to time. Although his friend Sarojini Naidu, a Brahmin, married a Bania doctor, and Vijaya Lakshmi, also a Brahmin, had married the brilliant young Bania writer, Pandit, Gandhi would not assent to his Devadas' marrying a girl of the highest caste.

The subject took its full toll of his health, although as usual he maintained that personal and family matters had no meaning for him. He plunged into a lecture programme, for khadi work. As before, Mira's letters followed him.

Sarojini Naidu, carrying the burden of Indian Congress work, did not demand a fraction of the thought Mira pleaded for constantly.

And there were grave enough matters to occupy the Congress president. An interview had been obtained with the British Viceroy, by Motilal Nehru and Gandhi; when they asked about the granting of statehood for India, they were told that the Empire's representative 'had no power over such things.' Younger members of the Congress were insisting that the only hope of attaining statehood was by war. It was a difficult thing to persuade them to wait until a request could be made by Gandhi and Madam Naidu for a Round Table Conference in

London. With tact and persistence, the young men were finally persuaded to agree that a letter be sent, asking for such a conference. No answer to the letter was received; the request had been brushed aside in parliamentary debate.

At the end of her first year in office, Sarojini Naidu was considered no longer only a woman clinging to Gandhi for advice. She had risen to the requirements of the task he entrusted to her. In an article for one of the American newspapers John Haynes Holmes, writing of the 'ten leading women of the world' did not mention Mrs. Besant, but among the first on his list was Sarojini Naidu.

20

SUSHILA AND LAKSHMI

THE WORLD PRESS announced that the Prince of Wales, delightfully debonaire, was 'becoming very proficient in the Charleston.' At the same time, it was reported that Jawaharlal Nehru was President of the Indian National Congress, and that Madam Naidu was preparing to leave for the United States, where she planned to lecture in refutation of Katherine Mayo's book, *Mother India*, which pictured the country as a combination of sewer and brothel, incapable of producing people worthy of self-government.

At Gandhi's ashram Horace Alexander, English Quaker, had come for a stay in 1928, leaving as Gandhi's friend and India's. 'What shall I say, when I get home?' he asked, and Gandhi replied: 'Tell them to get off our backs.'

In the United States, audiences meeting Madam Naidu saw a regal figure, resplendent in red and blue sari, with jewelled rings on ears and forefinger and necklaces about her handsome throat, bracelets on her now rather plump but still handsome arms. Was it true, asked a reporter, that she had been offered the mayoralty of Bombay, after her one year as President of Indian National Congress? It was 'not true,' answered Madam Naidu. Was her office in her home? Her office was in Bombay, her home 'twenty miles by train away in a quiet town.' She

lived there with her two daughters and her sons and husband, she explained patiently.

But when questions slid from the personal to the national – from herself to her country – the patience disappeared. Of *Mother India* she observed, disdainfully, ‘I have not much use for the tourist mind – three weeks, and write a book.’ Of Gandhi, she said, with feeling, that he had hoped to make a tour in order that the picture of India be truly presented; but his health and other matters prevented it. She was in America to speak for him.

There was no question that she impressed her listeners. Perhaps she rather overawed them. Grandeur and richness were underlined – in bearing, in costume, in speaking, while she served as spokesman of the man whom one writer had called ‘The Strange Little Brown Man of India.’

Mira, Madeleine Slade, was speaking for Gandhi also. He had sent her off on a project which included establishment of a centre in a far village, where she taught peasants weaving, sanitation, nursing. The village was Chatwan in north Bihar; at the tiny ashram a few people were helping her with the work she had been assigned. But she was dreadfully ‘lonely,’ she wrote to Gandhi. The next month, hearing he was not well, she rushed to him, and was roundly scolded; back at her ashram she sent a note to tell him that ‘it broke my heart’ to be reproved by him. In July, Gandhi wrote that he had received the letters sent him, that they had been redirected from Bezwada to Hyderabad, where he was now ‘under Mrs. Naidu’s roof.’ He was sorry to hear Mira was ill; he advised her patiently to eat certain foods and to eschew certain others.

On the train ‘after Bharapur,’ in March, 1927, as he left Mira to proceed to an ashram in Rewari, while he himself continued on a khadi tour, he wrote to her, even with sympathy:

The parting today was sad, because I saw that I pained you. And yet it was inevitable. I want you to be the perfect woman. I want you to shed all your angularities . . . Ashram is the centre of your home, but wherever you happen to be must be your home . . . Do throw off the nervousness. You must not cling to me in this body. The spirit without the body is ever with you. And that is more than the feeble embodied

imprisoned spirit with all its limitations that flesh is heir to. The spirit without the flesh is perfect, and that is all we need. This can be felt only when we practise detachment. This you must now try to achieve . . . This is how I would grow if I were you . . .

You must retain your individuality at all cost. Resist me when you must. For, I may judge you wrongly in spite of all my love for you. I do not want you to impute infallibility to me.

The love he had for her was of course only that which he gave, without stint, to all God's creatures. Within a few weeks, she had a breakdown, on learning that his blood-pressure had become high due to overwork. In 1949, she was to publish a slim book with some of his letters, or portions of them. The need she felt to be near him, and his withdrawal, are revealed in the years of his writing to her, up to 1932.

Madam Naidu was back from her tour. She had much to report. It had been a successful journey, though whether Americans had been persuaded to disregard Katherine Mayo's book was not certain. From Mira, however, letters continued to fly to Gandhi: she was miserable, she was ill. He told her that if she could not be 'radically cured,' she must make a change, going either to the seashore or the mountains, and adding: 'If you can hold out to June, you might perhaps go with me to Almora.' He advised her to 'eat fruits, and get well.'

She did not get well. When she wrote how thin she had become, he could not refrain from his characteristic kindness toward those in trouble, and replied to her: 'This leanness of body won't do.' He thought she needed a fairly large amount of flesh on her 'big frame.' Her tallness obviously dominated his mind, though he was unaware of this.

Finally, she could no longer continue. He wrote that 'it is unfortunate . . . you had to break up your ashram.' But it was better to leave than to become permanently ill, he knew. She must regain her strength, then she could return to work. But the need to reply to her letters exasperated him finally to the point where he suddenly told her:

I am not going to write to you every day for I fancy that you do not need any soothing ointment . . . Yes, you may take up dairy work, if you like.

He could not permit her ' to cling ' to him ' in the body ' ; it must be his work alone which was precious to her.

But she could not change, it seemed. Most of her friends had erased her from their minds, and those who remembered her sometimes thought her mad. There were some who thought she was in love with Gandhi.

What made this supposition the more preposterous to them was Gandhi's appearance. Twenty years earlier, there had been published a booklet, *Glimpses of Gandhiji*, by a friend of his named Diwakar; in the book was a portrait of Gandhi, in striking Khatiawar costume, the great turban framing his face so that its features seemed almost handsome, at least strong, not mis-matched and rather absurd. Since then he had become a withered little man, scraggly gray moustache emphasizing his all but toothless mouth, and the inevitable loincloth exposing skinny legs and thighs that supported a shell of skin about a meagre skeleton.

Nonetheless, there were those who were certain that Madeleine Slade had given up her home and family, friends and people, because she was in love with Mohandas Gandhi.

Whether she was indeed in love with him, nobody was ever to know, perhaps not even herself. But she longed only to be in his presence, to be as a servant to him. He would not permit her to become one of those in the inner circle of the ashram who had his fondness and personal concern. He thrust her from him, constantly.

It was Kasturba who went with him, on a khadi tour through Bihar. An American correspondent described him, addressing a multitude in one village:

... ten thousand were waiting for him ... all in loose white homespun, and with the Gandhi cap ... crouched in a vast circle ... silently ... Bullock carts were parked under trees but most came afoot and from distant villages after the day's work ... In the audience were only two women ... Gandhi appeared. A movement passed over the silent mass ... His voice was resonant, his smile beautiful. He spoke of Untouchability ... He talked of the *khador* work ... When he finished the people moved toward him in one great wave ... They touched his garment.

They, so many centuries oppressed, who had been taught to be timid and grovelling, who were ground down by crushing land taxes, saw in him not only hope of economic freedom but of a dignity which never had been considered attainable on earth.

A small woman stood apart, Gandhi's wife. But she would not be interviewed. 'There was a quietude in her . . . which shamed our bustling activity,' thought the American writer. Kasturba accompanied Gandhi only when he was not well and then simply to see that he had proper food and took enough rest, whether he wished or not.

Madeleine was at the ashram when they returned. Also waiting for them was Pyarelal Nayyar's fifteen-year-old sister, Sushila, who had come to spend a two-week vacation. A bookish, shy young creature, she had lately matriculated at college. She was much younger than her two brothers and her fashionable, very pretty sister. This was the first time in all her life that she had gone from home without her mother.

She had come, 'tremendously excited . . . as if leaving for some heaven on earth,' for her brother had promised she would 'be with the gods on earth'; his accounts of ashram children and of the ashram school made Sushila 'see them as an illustrious company.' In order to shield her from appearing 'foolish, by not knowing how to pronounce the *shlokas*' at her first evening during prayers, Pyarelal had made her sit beside him on the train, while he coached her until she was quite certain she 'had the lesson by heart.'

But when he brought her at last to the ashram, he was called away immediately. The Mahatma needed him, to take dictation on some very important matter. The young girl felt lost, 'miserable at the thought of staying from home so long'; she wanted to go straight back to her mother. She had grown from a withdrawn child into an equally withdrawn adolescent. Her heart-shaped face, framed in silky black hair parted Madonna-fashion, was dominated by grave, large eyes. She showed that combination of social immaturity and intellectual capability not uncommon in brilliant, precocious children. She did not know what to do with herself, alone in the ashram where she had anticipated such wonder, such splendid companionship.

Then Kasturba Gandhi came back.

She had not forgotten the girl. Although able to speak only

broken Hindustani, she took Sushila at once under her wing. She drew her into the circle of ashram maidens, who were cooking, sewing, spinning. In the ashram school, which aimed to 'develop the complete man or woman,' household chores were part of the curriculum, added to academic subjects. Among the maidens stitching away, spinning, cutting vegetables for supper, chipping wood, Sushila found that one of the most popular was Lakshmi, the adopted daughter of Kasturba and Mohandas Gandhi. Kasturba herself did not disguise her own special fondness for this child.

Pyarelal appeared, very briefly, arranging for his sister to sleep in Ba's hut, with the two other girls also there. Then he disappeared again into Gandhi's study. During the rest of her vacation Sushila barely had more than a glimpse of him. But she did not mind in the least, now.

She worked with the rest and loved it. She washed her clothes, but – because Pyarelal was not available to show her how to get water from the well – it was in the Sabarmati that she did the laundry. Her clothes came out mud-coloured. Kasturba, however, promptly showed her how to make them clean and white again, and thereafter 'someone always seemed to be about' when she needed water from the ashram well. Sushila had 'a suspicion it was by Ba's arrangement.'

Ba seemed to 'be everywhere at the same time,' she 'missed nothing that was done or needed doing or was left undone.' One day, Sushila saw her hurrying toward the communal kitchen, despite the burning midday sun. She had just come from Gandhi's hut, where she had rubbed his feet until he fell asleep. She had shooed away some ashram youngsters, lest they disturb his nap. Now, she was looking for Pyarelal, who had left Gandhi when she came.

'Should I call him?' volunteered Sushila.

Kasturba's rapid voice returned: 'Yes. He won't like to miss working with Bapu. You call him. But,' she added quickly, 'if he's having his meal, don't say anything.'

Sushila, leaving to find her brother, thought how like Ba the answer was. She did not see her brother except for snatched moments now and again, when he emerged from work with the Mahatma. But as her vacation came to an end, Sushila realized it had been 'a heavenly visit,' as he had promised. She had not

minded at all being wakened before dawn by the clangling bell; she had slept like a top on a mattress spread upon the floor, and when she rose it had seemed as if she had 'just lain down, the moment before.' She had spent every night in Ba's hut, as guest.

Sometime, she knew, she meant to become one of the ashram membership.

Before leaving home she had promised her mother 'not to take vows of any kind'; it was 'bad enough' that Pyarelal was dedicated to Gandhi, never wearing a civilized garment, either British or Indian. Sushila took no vows. But when she came back home she felt she never wanted to wear any but khadi clothes, that 'other things seemed artificial now.'

It had been Kasturba who – by example – made a convert of the thoughtful little girl.

Madam Nayyar would not hear of khadi clothing, however. She said indeed that 'no more clothes would be made until all the wardrobe is used up.' Sushila did not argue. She only washed her three or four 'changes of apparel,' as Ba had taught her to do. It was impressive to find that even 'with a limited wardrobe, one could be clean and tidy.' But at last her mother yielded; khadi clothes were to be made for the girl.

Guiltily, Sushila told herself: 'If she had not opposed me, I might not have stuck to khadi.' From now on, she meant to 'stick to homespun alone.' There was not a mere victory over her mother in this – it was an acceptance of some great symbol. The khadi garments worn bespoke unity with those who stood for India's struggle to be free. To this degree, Sushila Nayyar had already become part of Gandhi's work. It had been Kasturba, not the Mahatma, who had led her as far as she had come.

Her sister queried tauntingly: 'Well, did you make friends with the sweeper's child?'

Sushila looked at her, puzzled. She had 'met neither sweepers nor sweepers' children' at the ashram.

Her sister tittered, 'Hasn't Gandhiji adopted a sweeper's child as his daughter?'

Then only did Sushila realize, 'Lakshmi is not Ba's daughter, but a sweeper's child.' Before, it would have seemed monstrous to play and work and sleep in the same room with a pariah's daughter, for it was forbidden by religion. The young girl knew

that she would never again consider outcastes strange or really different from herself.

She had even been with people who were Unbelievers. There had been a Jew at the ashram. There had been Christians. There was an Englishwoman. But they were all as members of one family. Pyarelal, Sushila's brother, lived as brother to them all. And, to the girl, it all seemed wonderful and right. She also would be one of the family of people of many kinds, some day.

Sushila did not learn until later why Pyarelal could spend no time with her on her visit. Hour on hour he was kept taking dictation for two manuscripts which were to make world-history. One was a letter to the Viceroy, asking for an interview.

The interview was granted, and on 23 December 1929, Gandhi headed a group which included Motilal Nehru, Jinnah, Patel, and Sarojini Naidu to present demands for full Dominion Status of India, and propose a Round Table Conference in London to draft a constitution. Irwin, the Viceroy, said he could not promise this.

The demand remained the living, dominant issue of the India Congress. On 1 January 1930, before the Indian flag – striped saffron, green and white – Jawaharlal Nehru arose to read the 'Declaration of Independence' written by a committee he had appointed. Every delegate on returning home was to read the Declaration at a public meeting. The demand for statehood implied in simplest terms, 'no payment of taxes until independence.' On 26 January, millions throughout India took the pledge of complete independence.

But a salt tax was imposed by the Government, which had the salt monopoly. Gandhi asked that the law be repealed, because – although only a penny for every pound of salt – it meant a half dollar yearly out of the twenty-five-dollar annual income of the peasant. The tax was inescapable, since in the tropical heat of India the hard-working, perspiring peasant must have essential salt; and even cattle required salt to live. The letter was not answered, except by an acknowledgement from Irwin's secretary.

Mira saw that Pyarelal, and now Desai, also, were closeted each day through with Gandhi. She knew that 'momentous things were being prepared,' but Gandhi kept her out of his inner circle, unrelentingly, so long as she tried to cling to him.

Sarojini Naidu came, shortly, to join the conferences in

Gandhi's study. Only when Madam Naidu left did Mira and the other ashramites learn what had kept Gandhi and his two disciples occupied in the past weeks – the letter to the Viceroy, which had been written, rewritten, day after day.

In it Gandhi had also announced that on 12 March 1930, he meant to begin another war of *Satyagraha*. He would initiate it 'by symbolic breaking of the laws against salt.' He planned to lead a march to the sea,

to show that from the ocean, created by God, all men could take what they need . . . and would scoop salt, made contraband by the British . . . hoping by civil disobedience to convert the British people, that they may know the wrong they have done in India.

When Irwin ignored the letter Gandhi declared, 'It is now inevitable.' An army of reporters converged about the ashram, clotting every lane and field, and the excitement spread through India and the world.

Gandhi, as usual, rose at four on the morning of 12 March and also as usual led the ashramites in prayers. Then he started forth.

Sarojini Naidu came with his group.

When Mira pleaded to come also he said, immovably, 'You must not participate in India's political activities.'

21

SAROJINI NAIDU

HE AND HIS MARCHERS walked each day through, from 12 March to 5 April, in burning sunlight. Many of the young people collapsed, but Gandhi, who was sixty-one and in broken health, did not falter. Cooking was done in the open; they slept in the open when night fell. At village after village peasants ran forth to greet the party as it appeared; thousands on thousands joined the line. When the sea at Dandi was finally reached, seventy-five thousand had become part of the 'March to the Sea.'

Early in the morning of 6 April, Sarojini Naidu stood silent, as Gandhi stooped to lift a handful of salty sand – an everyday act, for who might not lift sand in his palm? Gandhi lifted the sand, and Sarojini Naidu cried out: ‘Hail, Deliverer! ’ Gandhi, who never used salt, was defying an Empire, mightiest government on earth, by his defiance of the salt-tax.

And all over India, millions followed him in their defiance. They boiled salt water and made brine salt, and no tax was paid. A no-rent strike followed. Patel, Gandhi’s old disciple, led a group in his own province. India seemed to rise, in full revolt.

Just after the midnight of 4 May, as Gandhi lay sleeping, thirty policemen came with written orders to arrest him. He did not even protest. Someone shouted: ‘Bapu, have you no message for Ba? ’ He called back, ‘Tell her she’s a brave girl.’ Without trial, he was gaoled.

It was to Mira that he wrote his first letter from prison, a letter full of good humour and even cheerfulness. She hurried to see him. But when she begged to come again, he replied: ‘It pained me to have to refuse . . . but I know it is right.’ However, he thanked her for ‘gifts showered on me, particularly for the extraordinary care over smallest details.’ He seemed freer with her, now that he was inaccessible. Jubilantly, he told her: ‘Thousands, thousands of men and women and children are refusing to pay the tax.’

Sarojini Naidu also visited him. She told him that the women of India had joined his army. Whenever a leader in their communities was arrested, they would organize ‘a day of mourning.’ They donned saffron robes, ‘the colour of sacrifice,’ to show visibly that they were prepared to suffer for his cause. In twos, in threes, they sat down on chairs placed before shops selling drugs, liquor or tobacco; they pleaded with men who came to buy at these shops to give their money instead to Gandhi. When pleading did not avail, they flung themselves across the thresholds, daring the men to walk over their bodies.

It was something never known before in India. But money was being gathered by this army of women, fighting with its own version of *Satyagraha*. They went to prison cheerfully. There were modern women, like Jawaharlal Nehru’s wife, Kamala, and his young sister, Krishna, who donned male attire and went forth to speak against the salt tax, expecting

prison as punishment. But these others were wives and daughters who had lived in purdah all their years. There was a story told of one young man who, eleven years before, had married without seeing his wife's face nor she his, until after the ceremony. He had come home lately to find his wife and his mother both jailed for participation in the tax war. He was cheerfully looking after the two babies and the house until his womenfolk would be released.

Even to Mira was assigned a task. Gandhi wrote to her that her 'central work would be with women and children.' She was to keep alive the khadi programme while he was in prison. On 20 July, 1930, she started on an All-India tour. A note from Gandhi came: 'Have I not expressed my love oftener in storms than in soothing affection?' He had forgiven her, finally. He even permitted her to do the task which he himself customarily undertook. She was to teach and speak and raise funds, if she could. She had been put first to scrubbing, to cleaning latrines, and later sent to school like a child. She had abandoned possessions, family, country, even her personal beauty – for Gandhi had insisted that she must shave off her thick dark hair. And she had not been permitted to be among those near the Mahatma. He had thrust her away, though others, even Muriel Lester, who had come for only a brief stay, were admitted to his friendly affection. Mira – who was an authority on Beethoven and mistress of six languages, had been told to remain with the young maidens and boys. But at last she was given a task which Gandhi himself performed, the task he held most vital for the peasants of India.

Nevertheless, he made clear that he would hold her sternly apart from all personal contact with himself, as from the beginning. Even so, he could not remain harsh. He wrote to her: 'You must not be anxious about me . . . He will keep me fit, so long as He needs me. Love, Bapu.'

It was to Sarojini Naidu that he turned to help him carry on his campaign, now that he was a prisoner. He designated one of his closest associates, Tyabji, as leader of the salt-tax movement, but should he also be gaoled, Sarojini Naidu was to assume full charge. 'She is capable of being Viceroy,' Gandhi said.

Just before his arrest, he had sent another letter to the Viceroy, saying that, unless the salt tax were repealed, a raid would

be arranged upon the Dharasana Salt Works. A curt reply warned him that arrests would follow if this were attempted. The raid was planned, notwithstanding. But soon after the first plans were made, Tyabji was arrested and imprisoned. Sarojini Naidu was now in sole charge of the salt war. It was she who must lead the raid on the salt works.

Her home was fifty miles from the mine. She rode to a highway leading to the mine, where a great gathering of men awaited her there. An American correspondent, sent to cover the story, cabled to his paper what he witnessed:

A dusty road . . . filled with Nationalists resting on the ground about a woman, who sat in an armchair passing away the time writing letters or hand-spinning. Facing her and her followers was an equal number of police, armed with sticks and with guns. The police were polite, but they were determined that the woman should advance no further, in her proposed raid on the Dharasana Salt Works.

She was past fifty; she was not really well. But she carried her purpose 'like a torch,' as a magazine article said with admiration. Others however were to call her 'an Indian Judith.' To the police she said, firmly: 'We ask no quarter and we shall give none, and I will cut the barbed wire with pliers, and seize the salt with my own hands.' She had no regret for what she was about to do: 'In making the most of this heaven-sent opportunity, I find something to bless, not to fear and regret.'

For a day and a night, she continued her passive resistance.

On the second day she rose to speak to her followers: 'You will receive beatings if we advance. You will be wounded when raiding the mine. And you must not resist. You must not even raise a hand to ward off a blow.' That was Gandhi's wish. She led them in prayer for a few moments. And now she looked at Manilal Gandhi, the gentle and ironic. He was to be the first to move toward the barbed wire about the works.

A roar came from the police. Manilal moved forward; steel rods beat upon him. Others were surging forward also. Blows fell on them pitilessly. None faltered; none turned back. They fell by the score under the steel-shod lathisticks striking them. Manilal did not pause as yard by yard he advanced to the barbed wire. But the police won.

Sarojini Naidu felt a touch on her arm. 'You are under arrest,' said a policeman.

She threw off his hand. 'I'll come,' she retorted, 'but don't touch me!'

22

MIRABEN

RAMSAY MACDONALD, the new Prime Minister, on 1 January 1931, released the hundred thousand men and twenty thousand women (some of these had been arrested while expectant mothers) who crowded India's prisons and detention camps. On 26 January, Lord Irwin released Gandhi, the Nehrus and other Congress leaders. Gandhi immediately wrote to able Lord Irwin – named by him 'the Christian Viceroy' – asking for an interview.

Irwin had grown to admire the Mahatma, of whom he said publicly: 'Gandhi is one of the greatest social reformers India has ever known.'

The interview began on 16 February. 5 March a truce was signed between the Viceroy and India's leader. Krishnalal Shridharani, who at that time was one of the thousands of students imprisoned in the 'salt tax war,' described the Gandhi-Irwin treaty, later:

At one o'clock on a moonlight night (was signed) . . . the pact. The Viceroy urged Gandhi to pose for a joint photograph in celebration . . . but Gandhi never posed before a camera. When the Viceroy offered a mild drink to his ascetic guest, Gandhi asked for a glass of water instead. Then from the folds of his loin cloth, he slyly pulled a neat little package . . . some 'contraband salt' . . . diluted a pinch of salt in a glass of water and drank it . . . A roar of laughter from the Indian and the Viceroy cemented the pact which paved the way to a new Constitution.

Later, Gandhi paid a call on Lady Irwin and admonished

her to spare an hour a day for his spinning wheel programme.

It was on the friendliest terms that the negotiations had continued between Irwin and Gandhi; among the objects of the talk was arrangement for a second Round Table Conference, to be held in London in 1931.

Because their talks usually continued through Gandhi's lunch hour, food was brought to him from the Birla family's house, which was used by his followers when in Bombay. Mira would arrive with the vegetables and fruit for Gandhi. As Lord Irwin watched, the stately spinster of forty sank to her knees, offering the dishes she had prepared for the Mahatma. What Irwin, later Lord Halifax, thought was not said. He had known her as a belle of London society. This was the first time they had met in India.

The Viceroy could not but have remembered that London thought Miss Slade insane for becoming a follower of her 'Indian swami.' With her mother she had retained a tender loving relationship, even across the thousands of miles dividing them. But her mother too had lately died.

Gandhi himself knew that the death of her mother had stunned Mira. She could not be comforted. Very gentle letters were sent to her now. When he left for Bombay he sent a note:

You are on the brain . . . I look about me and miss you. I open the *charkha* (spinning wheel) and miss you . . . You have done the right thing. You have left your home, your people, all that people prize, not to serve me personally, but to serve the cause I stand for.

All the time you were squandering your love on me personally I felt guilty of misappropriation, and I exploded at the slightest pretext.

What importunities had never accomplished, her sorrow did. She was admitted into the close circle of his personal interest and concern. She was permitted to serve him, since this was what she longed to do. That was the part assigned her during his negotiations upon the pact with Irwin.

A writer described her, incredulously, as kneeling in her long khadi gown, 'serving Gandhi as if he were a king . . . and touching his feet with her hand, before rising from her knees' before him. Perhaps the Viceroy understood that in India women paid this obeisance to men they revered and loved, that

even men made the gesture in token of honour and respect. At the ashram, maidens and older women both greeted Gandhi in this way; he did not deny them the privilege of doing so, if they desired it. Irwin, who had found in Gandhi a brilliant statesman, knew him also as a man utterly sensitive, deeply and intuitively responsive to others. Indeed, the title of Mahatma, much as he disliked it, he permitted others to use if they found comfort in doing so.

Irwin and Gandhi understood and appreciated one another. But when Irwin left in April, he was succeeded by Lord Willingdon, who lacked both personal tact and insight into India's problems. When, in June, the Empire celebrated the Prince of Wales' thirty-seventh birthday, Gandhi's followers did not participate.

Negotiations, begun so auspiciously with Irwin, began to die away. The *Spectator*, which was not unfriendly to India, observed:

Gandhi's arrest, in the dead of night, and the arrest of certain of his followers, must not deflect us. The Government must govern India.

But both the Empire and India wanted peace. Then the newspapers announced that a 'Round Table' was being planned once more.

Presently, a note reached Mira: 'I have your love letters regularly. . . . I note you'll be meeting me in Bombay for certain.' She was to be one of the party going to London for the Conference. Madam Naidu would be 'the official representative of the women of India,' but Mira also would have a position assigned her - interpreter to Gandhi's party. Gandhi had a valid reason for her coming. An interpreter was certainly needed in the stay abroad; but he did not forget that her mother had lately died in England.

A telegram reached her, in Bombay. Their ship was sailing in three days - on 29 August; she must get passage for the whole party - Sarojini Naidu, Devadas, Desai, Pyarelal, Gandhi, herself, and others. She 'dashed about like a young girl,' she told the others, trying to get everything done, to buy luggage, to squeeze into the trunks all the countless gifts pouring upon Gandhi from friends and co-workers. Only at the very last minute did Gandhi and Sarojini Naidu appear; they had been

obliged to charter a train to get to the ship on time at all from their speaking tour. Gandhi nonetheless insisted on seeing why his luggage was so heavy. He tossed out more than half that had been packed away, declaring he would not be seen arriving with so many belongings; what he discarded must be repacked and dropped off at their first post, to be sent to Kasturba for use among peasants.

As the ship was preparing to lift anchor, Jawaharlal Nehru came to say good-bye, though his sisters and he were in deep mourning. Motilal Nehru had died on 6 February, succumbing after hardships suffered in prison. Gandhi managed a smile for his visitor and asked, 'What will they say to my dhoti? And what, to my little white goat which is to give me milk?'

Nehru smiled in return, putting aside personal grief. Nehru was to carry sole responsibility for maintaining *Satyagraha* among the people while Gandhi was abroad.

In London, so the press seemed to indicate, the whole population waited to welcome Gandhi. One newspaper said:

We are waiting to lionize the Mahatma . . . His coming provides a measure of India's changed attitude to the Empire.

A wave of hope shone over London. The *Spectator*, which only the preceding year had called him 'Mr. Gandhi - Complete Nihilist,' prepared to have its editor-in-chief interview him.

But one question seemed to dominate all others, as Gandhi's party neared Europe. The *New York Times* asked it, plainly: 'Will Gandhi Wear Trousers?' At Paris, reporters crowded about him to enquire why he had not chosen 'plus fours, which the Prince of Wales was making fashionable,' instead of 'the celebrated loincloth and burnoose of white khadi.' He smiled: 'You choose plus fours; I wear minus fours.'

He added, less lightly, that he wore the loincloth because he was sent as 'sole plenipotentiary of India's people' - and in India the countless millions of Untouchables who were the mass of the people owned as sole garment, the ragged bit of cloth they wore about their loins. The rajahs who were also coming to the Conference represented, in their silks and brocades, their earrings and jewelled headbands and bracelets, a part of India to which he himself had no official responsibility on his journey.

In London he accepted Muriel Lester's invitation to stay at

Kingsley Hall, on an East End street. A thousand people were waiting for him when he arrived. To England and the world it was astounding that he choose a settlement house room, tiny and chilly, instead of a suite in one of the great hotels. A series of dinners and receptions had already been arranged for him; there were dignitaries waiting to confer with him. Only because it was too difficult for the latter to reach the settlement, did he rent a small office in the central part of London.

He was asked to speak at a hundred places – Friends House, Eton, Cambridge, Oxford, the London School of Economics. What he said seemed to engross his audiences no more than what he wore, however. A picture appeared showing him on the way to Downing Street, in white shawl and with bare legs exposed. Winston Churchill refused to meet him, but Lloyd George invited him to spend a day and was charmed by the small, fragile man. Newspapers showed Gandhi visiting St. James's Palace, with Sarojini Naidu, Devadas – and with Polak, reunited at last; Gandhi wore the loin-cloth and shawl that were by now known over all the world. His smile appeared in every photograph, but his smile did not make him less strange.

An invitation nonetheless came from Buckingham Palace to a great reception, where lords in their ancient decorations and ladies in jewels would meet India's plenipotentiary. Newspapers proclaimed: 'Gandhi plans to attend the Royal Reception in his loin-cloth and shawl.' He frankly informed a delegation, sent to bring the King's invitation, 'I'll neither kneel, nor bend my back, to any ruler.' Later, when interviewed by reporters, he laughed: 'His Majesty wore enough clothes for 'wo!'

The press gave a vegetarian dinner in his honour and was charmed with the man. Bernard Shaw met him, and declared that he was 'a man born once in a thousand years.' But newspapers had begun to feel uncertain whether he was a statesman, saint, or clown. The *Statesman*'s chief editor had him driven over in a limousine for an interview, and found him amazing: 'Few men of sixty-five have more vitality than Mr. Gandhi.' His recipe for health was quoted: eating less, wearing fewer clothes, taking enough rest, using prayer as daily exercise in meeting God. But the radiance seemed to be rubbing away from him, as the days went.

He appeared twice before Parliament. There was no question

of his brilliant mind, of his fearlessness .To the House of Commons he said: ' I will resist with my life the granting of separate electorates to Untouchables.' It was this segregation which the rajahs present at the Conference were demanding. Gandhi's words had no mere academic meaning to the world; he had proved that he meant what he said. But he himself stated after a time: ' Seeing the atmosphere here, I know I cannot infect British statesmen or the British public with the idea of Indian independence.'

Nevertheless he continued negotiations. And to the people, Gandhi's outlandish dress seemed to become more vital than his vision and courage and authority over a whole land. Lady Astor honoured him with a luncheon, serving vegetables only, since he would not touch meat. Her guests seemed startled and even bewildered because he revealed ease and great social grace, as a gentleman would - and yet he came in a single white rag tied about his bare legs.

He spoke to the weavers of Lancashire. Though Lord Snell grieved because India's khadi work was threatening the Empire's textile industry now, the audience greeting Gandhi fell in love with him, as workers always did. They cheered him when he told of what he planned and was doing in India. Beside him on the platform sat Mira, her head bowed, her hands folded on her lap. It was she who had become the woman constantly followed by the press, not Sarojini Naidu. Everything Gandhi did, and said, and thought, was reported - in millions of words over the civilized world. He was, it was admitted, ' the most publicized man on earth ' now. And with him, Mira had become the most publicized woman living.

When this writer was in London, three years after Gandhi's visit, friends in the city still remembered the astonishment evoked by his appearance in the regalia he chose, and also his cheerful, disarming smile, as he walked in his curious garb through slum streets, into the embassy, and even before the King.

It was told how every morning he set out on foot from Kingsley Hall, the children running beside him, touching his naked arms and shoulders, laughing at the strange picture he made. But, in fact, East End youngsters quickly forgot his garment; like boys and girls of Sabarmati Ashram, they fell

under his charm and ran beside him, because he wished their companionship, all the way through their Kingsley Hall neighbourhood. At the settlement house, reporters found, Mira did his cooking, sweeping, even his personal laundry. Wherever he went to speak, she was one of the party.

Newspapers sent their best men to question her. Why had she returned to England? Why had she left in the first place? What part had she in the Conference? She refused to speak of her father, once vice-president of the Anglo Persian Oil Company and earlier the chief of Britain's Indian Squadron. But she replied that she had no part in Gandhi's political work. Nevertheless she added: 'I am in England only because I have to come. To me, it is like coming to a foreign country. India is my home.'

Article followed article about her. It was noticed that her fine hands 'twisted as she spoke,' that her large dark eyes 'shone with an emotion impossible to fathom.' But when asked whether it was devotion to Gandhi or to his cause that held her to India, she did not reply. She said that 'a light seemed to shine' for her, when she read Rolland's biography of the Mahatma. Her face, with its high cheekbones, aristocratic angular nose, heavy brows over dark eyes, seemed serene, even happy. She was at ease in the Oriental garment of violet homespun, which fell to her slender bare feet. Only outdoors did she wear sandals. She said, proudly, that she had woven her own clothing. She sat with the quietude of the women of India.

Lady and Lord Irwin were honoured by the India High Commission with a great tea. Mira was invited; she replied that she could not come, because her 'chores were in arrears,' she must stay at the settlement house to do her own and the Mahatma's washing.

All that she said, all that she did for Gandhi, became subjects of amused scrutiny, of mocking conversation in the high and low places of London and in cities reading accounts of them both. Sometimes the accounts became all but hilarious. Perhaps there was reflected in the mockery an attitude toward Gandhi and what he was struggling to accomplish in London.

When Gandhi was asked by the *Statesman*'s editor if he would 'be satisfied with Dominion Status' he answered unequivocally: 'No.' But he explained:

We represent a fifth of the human race. Therefore, policies suitable to other dominions of the British Commonwealth would not necessarily suit us. You know what my answer is.

The skill and warmth of Irwin did not avail against Churchill's 'persistent hammering,' as a periodical called it. The *World Today* said:

No doubt, we here are losing the first flush of enthusiasm. More and more we are aware of the stiff obstacles before setting up federal government in India.

Another paper admitted that 'time and the tragic-comedy of Mr. Gandhi are wearing away the prestige of Lord Irwin.' It was observed that:

... last year, this country was in a mood to make peace... all parties were willing... This year, there is a more hesitant attitude.

Gandhi was failing in his mission. He himself said: 'Only the upper classes seem unchanging in their attitude to India.' And Churchill dominated the upper classes.

Winston Churchill's cousin, the sculptress Clare Sheridan, pleaded with both Mira and Muriel Lester, who were her friends, to intercede with Gandhi and win from him permission for her to do a head of him. Solely as duty to his hostess, Gandhi reluctantly agreed to let her come to do his head in clay, but he added firmly that he would never 'pose' for anyone. Hurriedly, Miss Sheridan sent word that she would work while he did his daily spinning.

She came on an appointed day to meet him. It was a raw, dismally cold autumn evening, with freezing fog over the city. She went to look for him. Later she recalled:

I realized that a white-veiled figure leaning against the parapet was Mira, looking more than ever like the Puvis de Chavanne's *Sainte Genevre*... She promised to wake me just before three o'clock. Half asleep, wrapped in fur coat, I followed Mira to the Mahatma's cell... a small cold room... He sat on a thin mattress on the floor and looked small and frail.

There were two Hindus and an Englishman with him. They sang hymns, Mira chanting with them. Then the sculptress

returned, shivering with cold, to her bed, but a little before five Mira wakened me again . . . It was Gandhi's walking hour . . . He walked so fast, two detectives guarding him lost him in the London fog . . . Mira pushed me gently toward him so that I could talk with him.

The head was begun, while he sat spinning later. It was an admirer's portrait of a great spirit, done swiftly in the wet clay, as sittings followed. At the end, Clare Sheridan gave her work to Gandhi, saying very simply: 'I have come to love you, Mahatma.' She could not find anything but reverent love for him.

He smiled, and answered briefly, that love for a fellow-being was a good thing. He told her also that her cousin, Winston Churchill, 'refused to see me.'

Yet he bore no hatred, no resentment, toward her cousin. He declared that Churchill acted according to his lights, as he himself must follow his own light. He prepared to return home. What was in his thoughts only Sarojini Naidu could have guessed. But he asked a few at the settlement house if they would wish to travel with his party through the Continent, while he waited at Brindisi for the ship he would take to India.

Devadas, Pyarelal and Desai, and Mira, finally composed his party. Madam Naidu went on ahead. Despite the stories mocking Mira and her devotion to him, Gandhi travelled with her to meet the Swiss peasant woman at whose cottage she had spent a year preparing for the hardships of *mihram* life. In Geneva he addressed an international peace meeting; in Paris he was asked to speak to another great audience. Then he went to visit Romain Rolland in Switzerland. The French author had a bad cold, but insisted that his guests must remain. He described their visit presently:

The little man, bespectacled and toothless, was wrapped in his white burnoose, but his legs, thin as heron's stilts, were bare. His shaven head, with its few coarse hairs, was uncovered and wet with rain. He came to me with a dry laugh, his mouth open like a good dog panting, and flung an arm around me, leaning his cheek against my shoulder. I felt his grizzled head against my cheek. It was, I amuse

myself by thinking, the kiss of St. Dominic and St. Francis.

This was the droll little figure which London and the world laughed about. But Rolland had written a biography about Gandhi, without even having seen him. He found that all he had said was verified in the man himself.

Of Mira, Rolland had known before she went to Sabarmati Ashram. They had been corresponding for many years, he now saw her also for the first time. He met a woman very 'proud of figure, with the stately bearing of a Demeter.' He could not think of her as a curiosity, ridiculous at best. Of the others in Gandhi's little entourage:

three Indian men, one a young son of Gandhi with a round and happy face, gentle but little aware of the grandeur of his name . . . The other two (Desai and Pyarelal) were two young men of rare qualities of heart and mind.

Immediately Gandhi's small group initiated in the French villa – as they had at the London settlement house earlier – the regime followed in Sabarmati Ashram. Before dawn all arose, to pray, bathe, then get to work, spinning being included for an hour daily. Every morning Gandhi came to Rolland's bedside for a chat. In the evenings prayers were held. Rolland loved the beautiful chants, from the ancient Sanskrit, one time from the *Gita*, another from the *Ramayana*. This last was, as Rolland wrote later, 'intoned in the grave warm voice of Miss Slade.'

In London, Mira had been regarded as playing in a farce. Rolland honoured her dignity, abnegation and complete sincerity. The group found her calm and composed, as she had never been in the years when she struggled to be accepted as one to serve Gandhi himself.

On the return to Bombay, reporters still pursued her. Asked what she thought of the Mahatma's concept of celibacy, she replied, in her low clipped voice, that 'there must be continence not only sexually, but in eating, pleasure, and all things . . . if there is to be preparation for a higher incarnation in the next life.'

Gandhi had changed her name, adding the suffix 'ben' – making it Miraben, which meant Mira the Sister. She was one of the ashram family at last.

23

SAROJINI NAIDU, MIRABEN AND KASTURBA

ATUMULTUOUS WELCOME was being planned for Gandhi. But even before he set foot on land he learned that Jawaharlal Nehru was again in prison, because of the widespread no-rent movement – supporting Gandhi's position in London, in regard to the Untouchables.

At the pier Pyarelal's mother was waiting to see her son after the three months of absence in London. Although she had drawn from her daughter Sushila a solemn promise 'to make no vows' with Gandhi, she nevertheless – as she explained – 'wanted to pay respects to Gandhiji, before leaving Bombay' for a vacation. He himself teased her: 'You've come to receive me? Now why not see me off – to gaol? And then follow us?'

To Sushila's surprise, her mother decided that perhaps they would not pack, but 'would stay on awhile.' And almost at once, Gandhi, Pyarelal and many others were arrested. In the next two months more than thirty thousand were to prison also. Kasturba made known that she stood with her husband. She too was arrested and gaoled, for protesting against discrimination toward pariahs. Others of the women were put in prison, among them Sushila Nayyar's mother, finally won over. She was sentenced on 4 January, 1932, to six weeks in the institution that held Kasturba.

Sushila, visiting her mother, saw how cheerfully the women bore their incarceration. They were, as 'Class A' inmates, permitted speech with the others; they were interested in the exciting and strange life stories they heard and in the goings and comings of the gaol population. It touched Sushila profoundly to find Kasturba studying a child's primer, in Gujarati, at sixty-two years of age.

In the ashram programme there were periods during the day when someone came to read aloud to Kasturba from the *Gita* or the *Ramayana*, neither of which – since they were in Sanskrit – was in the least understandable to her. But it delighted the old woman always to know she was hearing accounts of miracles, of the splendour of King Dashra's court and the wonder of Sita's wedding feasts, though not a word was comprehensible to her during the entire reading.

She was trying to learn how to read for herself, now that she had leisure in her prison cell. How earnestly she pored over the child's book before her! It seemed to Sushila Nayyar that she was the symbol of all Indian womanhood – loving, unlettered, devout. What part had she, the pious Hindu wife, in her husband's war for Untouchables? How could she understand that there must be no separate electorates for the pariahs, as the rajahs were insisting there must be? She did not try to understand. Gandhi had told the English Parliament that he would not agree to separate electorates for the outcast class, and Kasturba went to prison, because she followed him in his crusade, as she had been following him now these many years.

The six weeks dragged slowly, nonetheless, for her and for Madam Nayyar. Sushila observed that Kasturba Gandhi had reduced her diet sharply. She learned that this was because in his own prison, Gandhi was fasting. When other prisoners discussed differences between themselves and pariahs, Kasturba would interpose: 'But after all, God has made us all! How can there be high or low? It is wrong to entertain such feelings.' Gandhi had lately told India that the name 'Untouchable' must never be used. He renamed the pariahs 'Harijans' – children of God.

Sushila, preparing to study medicine, came again to the prison. Her closeness to Kasturba Gandhi seemed almost equal to that which she felt with her own mother. Her heart-shaped face had taken on great beauty; but its predominant expression was a grave reticence. She planned to be a doctor, and Kasturba was struggling merely to learn the Gujarati alphabet; but there was a deep likeness between Sushila and the older woman. She saw in Kasturba a withdrawing pride and abnegation. There was between them even a physical likeness – both so small, so exquisitely made: Sushila, preparing to enter the All India

Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, knew that one day she meant to offer her services to the villagers, as the Mahatma believed young people should. But it was because of Kasturba that she came to feel this.

Like Sushila, other young women by the many thousands knew they must give themselves to Gandhi's cause. His very failure in London evoked their love and devotion more deeply; for he continued his battle even after he failed. To them, the sacrifice which a woman like Mira made seemed only a natural thing. Many of them were disowned by their families, some had given up plans for safety and love and marriage, a number of them had abandoned plans for careers in professions, hundreds were in prisons, arrested not merely one time but again and again. Miraben, Madeleine Slade, was merely one more of countless women – and many times as many men besides – giving their lives to help India's cause.

Mira herself was happier than she had ever been since coming to India. For she had discovered a task. She took responsibility for sending news releases concerning Gandhi's campaign to the press in England, America, France, Germany and Switzerland. When Madam Naidu's health broke again in prison, Mira had not even the writer's advice and aid on which to depend. The Government sent her warning that unless she ceased sending news to foreign states she too would be arrested. She did not cease her work.

From Gandhi came a note, declaring he was relieved she had put on some weight: 'For your height and breadth you can easily carry 112 pounds.' His own weight 'remained 100 pounds.' He wrote again, and this time did not hide the fact that he was worried because Devadas had contracted a fever, and in still another note, worried because Manilal was ill with malaria. But now Kasturba herself was set free. She was able to go home and nurse Manilal, as well as his wife Sushila and the baby daughter, who had also become ill.

Miraben, after finishing a khadi tour, returned to Bombay, August 1932. She had been warned never to re-enter the city. She was arrested on the platform as her train entered the station. After a week under trial, she was sentenced to a year in gaol. Gandhi sent her charming, fatherly letters. He insisted she must not 'bother if you get no permission either to receive

visitors or even to write letters.' He could not but realize that what he advised was impossible for her. The prison rules permitted either a letter or a visitor, monthly. She immediately chose the former. No visitor could mean as much as a letter from 'Bapu,' she knew.

Kasturba also was arrested again, as was Sarojini Naidu. The three women were housed in the same institution. They made a curious trio; the nationally famed poet, previous president of the Indian National Congress, and head of the salt-tax campaign in place of Gandhi; the aristocratic, fine-strung English spinster; and the unworldly, artless, unlettered wife of Gandhi. But all were gentlewomen. All in acceptance of suffering expressed the unstinted devotion which Gandhi evoked in women of many kinds, even the most sheltered, a devotion wholly sacrificial and unselfish.

Gandhi wrote to Miraben: 'I am glad Ba is prospering with you. And learning Hindu. And making you sing hymns.' Perhaps Sushila Nayyar, when she called at the prison, guessed what was in the mind of Kasturba, spending day after day with Miraben, and even receiving instruction from her now. She had never accepted teaching from Gandhi himself.

But she chanted to the tall spinster her own Gujarati hymns, and in turn Miraben sang Church of England hymns to her. One day Gandhi wrote to Miraben: 'Your letter came, with Ba's.' He wrote on another day: 'A letter for Ba accompanies this.' She was learning to write, as well as read, though the characters were printed one by one, like numerals, and they ran up and down the page. She could not read his letters as yet.

Sushila knew that at the ashram Kasturba had been perfectly aware of the 'rivalry between the girls' there; she had remained in the background, permitting the young women to take Gandhi his food, bring his mail, wash his dishes. But Miraben had not been content with the small tasks which to others were precious privileges. Kasturba had kept her own thoughts, as she observed the English woman, year by year. They had not even a language they could speak together with ease; Kasturba had a very limited broken English, and Miraben spoke of course as a foreigner in Hindi — which, too, Kasturba barely comprehended, since her speech remained Gujarati.

Now, in prison, she and Miraben were thrown upon one

another's constant companionship. Madam Nayyar was released. A curious kind of friendship awakened between Gandhi's wife and his English disciple, a tolerant, even affectionate friendship. When Gandhi wrote that his weight was failing, that it was 'not even 97 pounds,' the two women worried together about his health.

Kasturba's term ended. Presently, Sarojini Naidu was released, because of her heart condition. Miraben remained in prison alone. She had not expected such happiness, as this – to be in prison for Bapu's sake, as a soldier fighting by *Satyagraha* in his war against her country for the rights of Indian pariahs, whom he had renamed 'children of God.'

24

KASTURBA

IN 1932, for the first time, the British *Who's Who* included Gandhi's name. It was part of the vocabulary of the world, though he was himself locked in Yeravda Gaol. His close friend, Patel, was in another gaol, to which he had been taken so that there might be no communication with Gandhi himself. Nehru was in prison. 27 January, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was sent to prison.

In September 1932, at Yeravda Prison, Gandhi entered 'a fast unto death,' as protest against division of Untouchables into separate electorates. The country was stunned by his plan; over the whole land people fasted with him, day by day. Within twenty-four hours, he was seen to be failing. The third day he was indeed near death. He had written to Mira, a few days earlier:

I am glad you have understood the reason for the fast. There is no escape from it . . . No one can dare talk of his own strength in a matter of life and death. The question, therefore, is whether I am found worthy of the needed strength and also whether the cause is of

the required purity and thirdly, whether in truth I am free of every trace of violence in undertaking.

The fast he vowed to endure.

She all but collapsed, hearing of his own near-death shortly. Yet, despite his physical exhaustion, he had the astonishing, characteristic strength to send her a note of comfort:

The thought of you corrodes me. I wish you could be at peace. Do write and wire tomorrow your condition. I am taking the fast very well . . . Be steady and strong. Have faith in God. Shall send you daily report through Mahadev (Desai). May not be able to write myself.

He insisted, next day, in two lines sent her, 'You are not to break. You must be seeing God's grace pouring in abundance as perhaps never before.' But that same day he wrote again the fast was broken. It had lasted less than a week. He had been saved from certain death, by the Government's capitulation. The 'Yeravda Pact' was signed, providing, to be sure, only a compromise, but initiating the programme he wished followed with pariahs. Moreover, in all India, temples had been opening their doors, during his days of fasting, to the Untouchables who for centuries were forbidden entrance. A new way of brotherhood, in their faith, had begun. That too was the fruit of his fast.

Kasturba had small understanding of his reasons for fasting. But she had fasted because he did, as usual, taking only enough food to maintain strength needed to nurse him, should he collapse. Later, in 1933, he entered on a twenty-day fast for purification; he remained well, curiously, throughout this long ordeal. Kasturba fasted with him.

From his prison, Gandhi sent word to his people to 'face a fiery ordeal, without hatred or violence.'

Early in February 1933, the *New York Times* reported that Kasturba was 'arrested on a secret charge.' She had been warned 'to leave the vicinity of Sabarmati Gaol, take up residence elsewhere in another town, and refrain from civil disobedience.' She did not obey. Meetings of Indian Congress were forbidden, and though she had no slightest contact with the organization, when her husband protested against this order she immediately echoed him, and found herself in gaol again. He was arrested again twice in rapid succession.

In his prison cell Gandhi now began work on a new plan. Only he could have imagined, and even succeeded in beginning, the project as a prisoner. A new periodical, the *Harijan*, was initiated. It was to be devoted to propaganda urging acceptance of Untouchables in every way. 'Henceforth,' announced Gandhi, 'among Hindus no one shall be regarded as Untouchable, by reason of his birth.' The very name 'Harijan,' which meant 'Child of God,' spoke for his rejection of ageless discrimination against the pariah.

Gandhi went to see Mira in Sabarmati Gaol, writing her a note next day from the ashram:

I hope you were not over-excited after the interview.

You have to put on more weight if you can do so without being ill.

But the next day he himself was arrested to prevent his intended march to the village of Ras. Because previous facilities to house Harijans – that is, those not members of his own higher caste – were withheld, he announced he would enter a fast, to underline the fact that he refused better accommodations than those which would be offered to the least Untouchable prisoner.

Because of his previous three weeks of fasting, his health broke almost at once. As during his brief earlier fast in 1932, this one immediately caused a physical collapse.

Mira wrote to him frantically:

God gave me light to recognize His messenger . . . in you. He will therefore give me strength to go through everything and anything for the fulfilment of His word through you. . . . My love would be a poor thing, if it failed at this supreme moment and gave way to misery and desperation. And that is my cry, borne on the wings of a love which knows no bounds.

She was terrified, when she heard of his plan. She knew how shattered his health had become. He was now a man of sixty-four years. He began again a 'fast unto death.' His wife began one also, at once.

The day she began fasting she, with fifteen other women, was arrested; she was released and rearrested again because she continued public statements about her husband's fast. Only three months earlier her youngest son, Devadas, was married to Lakshmi after long years during which Gandhi had refused to

permit the marriage. It was even celebrated with religious rites, though followed by a civil ceremony. As usual, Gandhi had put aside his former objections without apology, since 'truth' came to him more clearly and was acted upon as revealed to him. Kasturba on her part at last had the joy of participating in the ancient ceremonies of a Hindu marriage. But almost immediately afterwards she had been arrested and imprisoned. And since then, one arrest had followed the other, with bewildering swiftness. She never faltered. She never asked for special consideration because of her age, which like her husband's, was now nearly sixty-five. She fasted in gaol, as he did in his gaol, and she fasted because of the pariahs as he did, though outcasts were in her secret heart still as abhorrent to her, a Hindu woman, as they had been when she was a child in her father's home and ran to be purified by prayer and bathing whenever an Untouchable defiled her by brushing past her garment.

Announcement of Gandhi's new fast evoked in England a mixture of anger, indignation, and consternation. His own people understood him as Europeans could not. He himself had been taught by Putlibai Gandhi years ago that their faith rested on belief in purity. Purity came through suffering. By attaining purity – through self-mortification – and thus attaining truth, it was possible to make truth known to others. Gandhi hoped to make the truth he saw regarding Harijans known to all his people. They would then assent to his proposals in regard to the outcasts.

It was simple and clear to his countrymen, he knew.

All that was needed was for him to endure pain and illness enough.

But his strength gave out, rapidly. Fear mounted over the land. Bulletins were sent out daily by the prison, concerning his failing health.

Miraben collapsed in her prison cell on hearing how dangerously ill he had become. He knew now that her love for him was as for a saint she had chosen to worship.

The first day of fasting ended; as the second began, it seemed that he had indeed entered on a fast to end in death. The third day came. The authorities hastily brought Sarojini Naidu to him, from her cell in the Women's Prison. She sat beside him, in

the prison yard, his cot placed beneath a mango tree just outside his own cell. She was told to stand by, while a spark of life remained in him. Other friends were permitted to come — Nehru, his sister Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, and Rabindranath Tagore.

The great poet of India stood beside his friend and stared down at the tiny form lying at the rim of death. 'Gandhi,' he said, 'you are a dauntless warrior.'

It was necessary to take him to the prison hospital, to die. But he would not break his fast, even to save his life. He could not even dictate a reply to frantic letters from Miraben. Kasturba was brought to him. To her, he whispered: 'I am not likely to survive this time. You must not worry and you must not break down.' She, who was fasting with him, nodded, and she did not cry.

He managed to speak again: she must bring his few wordly possessions, and distribute them among the attendants. She said, 'It is only right, to do so.' Next day she brought him all he owned on earth — his two sandals, his spectacles, his dhoti, his cotton shawl, his big dollar watch. Then she prayed to her gods.

Andrews, the English clergyman, who had written a biography of her husband and had been his friend since Gokhale sent him to aid in the South African war for Indian rights, came in to see her. The Government was setting Gandhi free. A note was sent to Miraben, dictated by Gandhi: 'My fast is broken.' Kasturba was feeding him a drop of water with orange juice diluted in it, at spaced periods during the day. She had begged that he take this food from her. And he nodded, managing to answer that he 'wanted to live . . . to continue fighting.'

Miraben, who was freed at this time, raced to the prison hospital. They would not permit her to see Gandhi, for some stupid reason the attendant refused to state. Then she learned that he had been taken to Parnakuti, in the prison ambulance. She hurried there next. The first man she saw was Reverend Andrews, the English minister. He said, 'There is not much encouragement.' On all sides, ashram members repeated, 'Bapu has come to his last moments.'

She ran to Gandhi, where he lay. Kasturba came forward, wringing her hands and weeping: 'Bapu will not survive —'

The tall woman towered over her, in silence, her dress dusty

with the dirt of her long journey. Then she answered the other, quietly: 'No, Ba. I feel Bapu cannot be going to die.' She was certain of it. And strangely she was proven right. He did not die.

He had fasted only a few days. He had made all India aware of his battle to win all equality for the outcasts. That was a victory of sorts. Recovery was to be slow, but his wife began nursing him to health, insofar as he could ever be well again.

Nehru's father had died in the war without violence against Britain. Now his wife — exquisitely fragile, most finely bred — died in her prison, a martyr to the war to gain equality for Untouchables fought with her own people. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was in prison; she and her brother were released, at this tragedy. Other leaders remained imprisoned still. The war was with Ali Jinnah, and his Moslem followers, as well as with the haughty princes of Hindu faith. It seemed a deadlock. But those who stood by Gandhi did not ask for quarter; they went on fighting, as he wished, through *Satyagraha*.

It cut Miraben to the quick to see how shrunken and pale he had become. His buoyancy was gone. In England, it was said by one editor: 'The Mahatma is a spent force.' In September 1934 he announced his decision to 'retire from leadership in the India National Congress'; he even gave up his membership. He was never to rejoin, though his reasons were to be a belief that 'no man should dominate it permanently.' However, he was still the leader, and his wishes were the key to what Congress did.

But, early in 1934, he was again on a khadi tour.

His work for Untouchables had been continued as long as he could carry it on. Muriel Lester had come, earlier in the year. She had resigned her position as director of Kingsley Hall, to travel and lecture in China, Japan, the United States; often there had been included in her addresses discussions on Gandhi and his work. When she stopped in India on her way back home, Gandhi telegraphed her to join his party on a tour in behalf of the Untouchables; she accepted at once. He exhausted her, with his daily programme. She described it, with wonder:

For months, we went from place to place . . . with five, six, open air meetings daily . . . speeches, then collections, then long processions of people who brought gifts, often taking off jewellery to offer to Gandhi . . .

Then Gandhi became an auctioneer, selling it! He would travel all night, repeating the same thing next day. It wore the Englishwoman out, but the small man continued, unflaggingly. Even he collapsed, nevertheless, at last. He was obliged to go to the ashram to rest. He seemed suddenly a sick old man.

Miraben also had accompanied his party. She could not hide her anxiety. He seemed passive and defeated, physically.

One day she said to him: 'An inner urge has come to me to go to England. I could speak there of Bapu's work.' She could talk 'especially of the working classes.' They had given Gandhi a warm welcome when he addressed them, in Lancashire, during their 1931 stay. She would explain Gandhi's 'message to the people.' After England, she would continue to the United States. Gandhi did not forbid her going; he gave her mission his blessing, instead.

Apparently, it did not occur to either of them that she was proposing a journey which would take her thousands of miles from him. She had clung to him the ten years past. But now she herself asked for leave to travel a great distance from him. But it was to help his mission that she would go. She had become what he desired of her, she spoke as fellow-worker, as comrade. It was October, 1934.

Five days later, Miraben was sailing for London. News of her departure flashed to all the press. It was as if a queen or a notorious actress or a successful gang leader were setting sail. She found herself competing suddenly in newsworthiness with the Prince of Wales himself. Every move, every public word of hers was reported from the moment she left Bombay until she reached Southampton. There sailed at the same time from America Douglas Fairbanks, a celebrated movie actor, and his wife. From South America there left for England a noted suffragette, after attending the world conference on women's rights there. But all were brushed aside to make way for Miraben's return home – and without Gandhi.

His fast, his near-death, his retirement from Congress leadership, paled before the fact that the English aristocrat was sailing back, and this time without him.

25

MIRABEN

IN THEIR DAILY PAPERS the British people saw pictures taken of Queen Mary purchasing cotton and woollens at one of the booths of The British Industries Fair; she gave them a royal example in patriotism by her buying of domestic textiles, which were in need of a larger market because Gandhi's khadi had been displacing English products in India. Formerly India had been one of the largest sources of income to the textile manufacturers.

At the Fair, Queen Mary now and again appeared with her daughter-in-law Elizabeth, formerly Lady Bowes-Lyon, whom the second son of the Royal Family had wooed in Scotland, and married in 1923. It was discreetly murmured that, although possessing distinction, great charm, and high intelligence, the Duchess of York was not quite as decorative as the Greek princess whom their young Duke of Kent had chosen; but the people would not have had Elizabeth changed by the breadth of a hair. She was a youthful, pretty reflection of all that the highest family in the Empire should represent. Her two little daughters, Elizabeth and Margaret, enhanced the pages of not only Britain's but the world press, as often as did their uncle, the Prince of Wales.

In Russia a large group of political leaders had just been executed, as suddenly discovered traitors to the U.S.S.R. In Germany, Hitler – successor to the aged Hindenberg – sent out a decree that henceforth the whole Army and Navy must wear swastikas, on pain of death. In the United States, as throughout other civilized nations of earth, the depression lay like an inescapable pall; not a week passed which did not have its tragic suicides of men broken by loss of all they had possessed. The little English princesses and the handsome Prince of Wales were as light and laughter in the universal fear and despair.

The Prince chuckled one day: 'Those who were bored when

I spoke on the radio needed only to flick me off, by touching an electric button! ' There was a new attitude of royalty expressed in him, a democracy not known before. His appearance at a public event in March, without a coat, set aquiver the leaders in fashion and woollens both; his approval of a fashion – or a play, a hat, a horse, a face – became instantly the pattern by which young men measured their own choice in all these. His winning smile, the short but supple figure, the boyish head were beloved wherever he appeared. He would one day be King-Emperor; his would be a delightful, sophisticated reign, with the aura of theatre, fashion, sports, paramount in English life.

Magazines and even newspapers in England noted, most guardedly however, that he seemed to pursue an increasingly informal routine of play, travel, dances, but not a syllable was published about the preference he was showing for the companionship of an American woman who had of late displaced his other feminine companions. But *Time* magazine, in the United States, observed in a brief squib:

Edward was having such fun, with beauteous Mrs. Wallis Warfield Simpson, at Cannes. He sent back to Marseilles an airplane ordered to take him to Paris. He danced . . . the rhumba with her . . . She became THE Mrs. Simpson when . . . he met her . . . at the train and carried her suitcase out from the railway coach in his own hand.

A snapshot of the two sitting in a small restaurant was published. British editors seemed wholly unconscious of this story.

In the same issue of the magazine was an account of Miss Slade's tour. The British newspapers sent reporters by dozens to interview her. Why had she come to England again? Why had she gone to India in the first place? Had she become a Hindu? Though now without the supporting presence of Gandhi, she met them unflinchingly; she answered questions with composure. Those who sought to discover why she – member of the Mayfair circle of which the Prince of Wales was head – had cast aside luxury, fashion, fun to follow Gandhi, obtained no answer from her. But she did not hesitate to say that on reading Rolland's life of the Mahatma she had seen 'light' and had followed that light.

He had given her a 'philosophy' by which to live. She said, thoughtfully choosing the words:

We led an absolutely useless existence . . . Memories of men marching away, forever, haunted me. Zeppelins. London. Cheering crowds, which completely forgot the human sacrifices in victory . . . I knew there must be a philosophy to set the topsy-turvy world aright . . . Poverty, alone, brings freedom.

She stressed that Gandhi's concept of celibacy implied not only 'the sexual side, but abstinence in other physical desires': she did not explain why she denied herself these desires except by adding that she had been 'dissatisfied, unhappy for years' before she left for India, that everything 'had been dark and futile' until she became a disciple of Gandhi. She did not explain why.

As to her religion? She answered questioners: 'I follow Gandhi's religion of service. But I am not a Hindu. I think it is very difficult to describe the God of the Hindus.' Nonetheless, she added very simply, very openly: 'There was Christ and Buddha, and now there is Gandhi.'

She had come, she explained, 'for a fortnight's lecturing to explain the Mahatma and his work' and 'to correct misstatements made by the press.' She described, in the lectures she gave, her ashram life:

We lead an absolutely simple existence, with no servants to wait on us. When we aren't studying, we are being taught some useful craft . . . instead of empty leisure, there is necessary material training whenever ashram work does not need to be done.

She spoke of her two terms in prison, one extending for a year and a half:

Both times were for sending accurate information to friends in the United States and England . . . I read Hindu Scriptures, books on Buddhism, and the Koran – from cover to cover.

She proved an excellent speaker. She told her audiences, without a shadow of emotion, as if she were stating matters only of objective meaning to herself:

Gandhi is retiring from leadership of the Congress to be more free, serving the people not officially as one

connected with the organization . . . He offered the ashram to the Government and received only an acknowledgment of his letter . . . He has decided to make it a centre of educational and vocational training for Harijans, as he had named the Untouchables.

She met not only audiences and the press, but Government leaders. To them also she presented the case of India, as Gandhi saw it.

Parliament that week was debating 'Dominion Status'; the term was defined in debate. The House of Commons passed a bill on 'sedition.' Elections followed, and quite astoundingly, Labour won by a landslide. But throughout her stay, Mira remained one of the major subjects of newspaper consideration. It was admitted, almost unwillingly, by one interviewer: 'There is very little of the mystic about her.' A quality absent in her earlier visit in 1931 was noticed by many: 'A lightness of manner, accented by rippling laughter, which lessens the feeling of fanaticism that her words convey.'

A very discerning comment pointed out that, although her beliefs 'seemed to have changed her whole life, her personality appeared unchanged.' Despite her shorn hair, bare feet and khadi garment, she might have stepped from any Mayfair group to announce she was a follower of Gandhi. 'In the midst of London gaiety, duty called her,' a writer stressed. But she did not, to her own people, seem changed, essentially. Almost unbelievably it was admitted that 'she seems to have contentment and security.'

In October, she sailed for America. She took a tourist cabin instead of the 'third-class berth' which Gandhi would have wished, because no accommodation in the lowest class was available on the *Majestic*. Judge Seabury, who had caused New York's insouciant mayor, Jimmy Walker, to flee the country, was just back from a trip abroad; Evangeline Adams was on the pier, waiting to take ship for England. But reporters swarmed about Madeleine Slade, as she left the gang-plank.

'Madeleine Slade,' she told them, 'died nine years ago, when I renounced the world.' A magazine writer noted that 'the British disciple of Mahatma Gandhi arrived in Manhattan after a stormy passage. Miss Slade shivered in her woollen robe and sandals.' She brought as luggage a cloth bag and a brown-paper

parcel. Her stay in New York was to be at the Henry Street Settlement House, on the lower East Side. She declared her room 'most comfortable, the bed excellent,' but she 'preferred to sleep on the floor.' She squatted on the floor instead of using her desk when she wrote letters.

In the bright white light of Manhattan, she seemed incredible. She said she meant 'to try to give the Mahatma's point of view' to America. She spoke of her ashram work: 'Long walks, over hot dusty roads, until one's sandalled feet were bruised and aching' – in order to reach village after village, in Gandhi's khadi programme; 'cooking and cleaning and washing for one's self to be in addition.' Listeners gathering at the Barbizon Plaza and in Westchester and on Long Island stared at her incredulously. Yet she won their respect; she compelled them to accept her sincerity. She did not, in New York, as earlier she had not in London, seem a fanatic, as one reporter admitted:

Despite a sharp aquiline nose, thin-lipped mouth and Oxford accent, she is more Oriental than British in appearance . . . Her swarthy skin, long exposed to the Indian sun, and her costume, are the reason, as is also a certain static repose . . . but her eyes do not seem those of an ascetic.

When Woolf, well-known illustrator for *New York Times*, sketched her head, she played constantly with a key ring and occasionally lifted her burning eyes – so he saw them – to the artist. In her long white habit, snowy hood and robe, she seemed to him almost a nun, but 'she did not look a disciple of Buddha or Vishnu.' He could not understand why she had chosen 'to leave Mayfair and live a Spartan life as Gandhi's disciple.' Although her voice had 'a whining Eastern inflection' while answering his questions put as interviewer, when the subject turned to other matters the natural cadence of her speech appeared, and she 'used the brisker inflections of the upper-class Englishwoman.'

Perhaps – unknowingly – this was the profoundest analysis made of her. To her own people she had been unalterably the British aristocrat, within her being, no matter what garment and manner of life she chose. To America she was an Oriental in appearance, but unconsciously betrayed the Englishwoman. It

may be that she herself did not realize she played a part, the part of an Eastern woman who was of Gandhi's people. Whether she loved him as man or as a divine being on earth had no meaning; she had need to give love and to offer herself in a noble service, and as by a miracle she found him; and in him found one of the greatest beings of her time, and of all time.

With her cloth bag and brown-paper parcel she proceeded to Pendle Hill, the Quaker religious centre in Pennsylvania. This writer met her there. She seemed more like a convert to Wesley or James Nayler than a woman of the twentieth century. There was a sense of waiting in her aspect, as if she waited only to return home. But, before sailing, she visited Washington. The *New York Times* reporter saw her,

on bare sandalled feet . . . the famed Englishwoman
disciple of Gandhi, walk . . . into the White House and
patter . . . across the room to meet Mrs. Roosevelt.

The two tall women liked one another – both aristocrats, both dedicated to social ideals. Miraben appreciated 'the simplicity of the President's home.' Later, she asked the reporter interviewing her where she could buy a vegetarian meal, and was pleased greatly to hear of a cafeteria near the White House itself, where modest prices were charged. Wholly untroubled, she walked past staring diners who could not take their eyes from her long figure in its homespun sari and hood.

She took an aeroplane to her ship, but the mechanical wonder of swift travel had meaning for her only as convenience, in shortening her way back home. The mission she had undertaken had done little, she knew, to advance Gandhi's cause. She herself remained a curious, almost droll, figure to the world.

26

KASTURBA

CHURCHILL SAID: 'All that Gandhi stands for must be crushed.' He pointed out that 'eight out of ten Englishmen depend on India' for their income. In 1935, the New India Act was passed, by which five hundred semi-independent little princely states would be federated with the eleven provinces under British rule. Gandhi knew he could not approve. He must unite India by uniting those who declared themselves divided by reason of religion – Moslem and Hindu – and by reason of geography – India and Pakistan – and above all by reason of caste. He was preaching this, in *Harijan*. But there were matters within his own family which were confronting him also.

Harilal Gandhi had sent letters to the Indian press deriding his father and announcing that he was considering turning Christian. At once from his mother he received a letter she dictated to his brother, asking how dared he ask 'innocent and ignorant people' to listen to him speaking on religion: 'You are not fit to preach religion,' she reminded him. He had been arrested only lately in Madras for drunkenness and disorderly conduct. The magistrate let him off next morning with a rupee fine, because of his father's name, she told her son frankly. 'It does not behove such an intelligent boy as you,' she added, to her fifty-one-year-old son, himself now a grandfather, 'to behave as you do.'

She confessed that he left her 'no place to turn, for sheer shame.' She dreaded not hearing of him as much as she did hearing about him. How did she know he 'was not eating forbidden food'? But what cut her most deeply was his criticism and derision of his father. His father said nothing, but she knew how he felt. 'Your father always pardons you, but God will not tolerate your conduct,' she said. She, 'the frail old woman,' begged her son not to wound her, but above all, not to hurt her husband further. She thought him one of the great

beings of India. His sons should revere him as she did.

As Miraben had pleaded for Gandhi in England and the United States, so did his wife plead for him with their son. But Harilal was not deflected from his hatred. He loved his mother in a bewildered, lost fashion; toward his father however he felt only hatred, as the man who had ruined his life from boyhood onward.

Gandhi had a nervous breakdown, the first in his turbulent years. He was very ill for ten weeks.

His own dark anxieties and the misery of the whole world – shadowed by a depression which lay seemingly over all the civilized earth – made even Sabarmati Ashram seem too luxurious a place in which to live. He offered it to the Government to be used for those in need. His offer was disregarded. He then gave it away as site for a school where Untouchables would be taught. The ashram membership was disbanded.

Two people were completely lost with the ashram gone – Miraben and Kasturba. What did their lives hold, other than the reflection of love for him?

On 15 April, 1935, he took a one-room hut in a minute village eleven miles from Wardha, in central India, a place so primitive and remote that it had no railroad, no post office, not even a shop. He chose the village because its population was mainly Untouchables. Into his hut he took two Untouchables, to share the home he began there. He was free of friends, disciples, adulation, at last. He would share the experience of the least advantaged of his fellow-beings. He would not merely write on their behalf, he would not speak for them, as he had been doing; he would be one of them. He had desired to live alone, to work for his fellowmen, even when he first came to India, after leaving South Africa more than twenty years ago.

Kasturba was left to the care of her friends and her sons.

In Bombay a public meeting was held one day in her honour. Madam Naidu, plump, handsome, ready with her gift of words, presided. She began by declaring it was her 'own special privilege to join with the other ladies of Bombay, to accord Madam Gandhi this special ovation.' She believed that:

All Indian women must associate themselves with the presiding matron of the day, in spirit, to honour one who by her rare qualities of courage, devotion, and

self-sacrifice, has so signally justified the high tradition of Indian womanhood.

She reviewed Kasturba's life in South Africa, her imprisonment there, her many prison experiences in India. She declared that in his wife, Gandhi possessed a helpmeet who made possible the work he had done for his people. She emphasized the fact that Kasturba

accepted, without question, his decision and strengthened his purpose with prompt and willing renunciation of all her most dear and pressing desires, thus standing for the ideal of loving sacrifice, and inspiration, shown by mothers of the race.

Kasturba herself did not rise to respond. Her sweet old face expressed a gentle dignity, as she listened to panegyrics of herself.

She was not well. Her prison terms had worn away her once sturdy health. Her beauty, which up to now had been retained, was lost at last. Her once even, white teeth no longer flashed in a smile; her shorn hair was grizzled. Her figure was still staunchly straight, but much shrunken.

Horace Alexander, the English Quaker, recalled that when he had visited Sabarmati Ashram, he 'tried to have a nice little talk' with her, but found that she spoke very little English. She seemed to him 'a good *hausfrau*, a motherly woman.' He heard her instruct others, several times, to 'offer him milk, or what-not.' He could see that she was 'taking notice' of him as ashram guest. When he left, she came over to bid him good-bye. But whenever he thought of her later, he remembered that during his entire stay he 'had not seen her and her husband together; they never seemed to have exchanged a word.' Yet he was certain 'they were constantly aware of one another.' But, though she spoke very little and participated almost not at all in her husband's conversations, he saw that she 'looked as if she shared pretty fully the burdens of her husband.'

Now Kasturba Gandhi shared her husband's burdens by remaining apart from him. That was his wish, and she had never intruded on him when he wished to be apart. She had followed this path since their marriage fifty-three years ago.

A booklet appeared, *The Woman Behind Gandhi*, by an Englishman, J. S. Bright. It reviewed Kasturba's life, from the little girl

in Porbandar, to the woman honoured now. Exquisite portraits showed her in her youth. Perhaps a thousand people saw the small brochure. Kasturba was, very literally, the woman behind Gandhi, tiny and obscure, in his great shadow.

In May, 1935, Gandhi wrote to Miraben, frankly from his hut at Wardha:

... you need have no anxiety on my behalf. I am quite clear in my mind that it is well not to take you with me. But this is no precedent for the future. And in any case yours is to be the final word.

He became ill, and Miraben nursed him, cooked and washed for him. It was the great reward accorded her after the bleak years preceding. She could spend herself in his service, and he needed the service. There was for her something of holiness in the task. Had she not told reporters in New York: 'You have your Christ. To me, Gandhi is Christ.'

Before the year closed, he was at work again.

Endless letters had been coming to him, with appeals for establishment of an ashram. He realized that a duty lay upon him, to acquiesce. There were two reasons. An ashram would provide the pattern on which villagers nearby could model their own lives; and simultaneously, the people of India would be shown a living example of the ideal relationship between Harijans and other castes.

Mira was given responsibility of finding a place for the ashram. Gandhi told her to look for the poorest village in Wardha district, which itself was the poorest in the country. The place she selected was near Sageon. There could not have been a drearier spot. The countryside was hot and dry in summer, during monsoon months there was thick mud everywhere; in winter it was cold and damp. Three fourths of the people were Untouchables, and the most forlorn pariahs in India, even in their own unhappy class.

Early in January 1936 Gandhi went to the ashram. He planned to name it 'Sevagram,' which meant 'Service Village.' Miraben helped him build a small mud shack. Kasturba came to the dreary, forbidding place, and, quickly, others followed. Huts rose about Gandhi's, all over the barren ground, to right and left. A road was cut by ashramites. Work began, on the

familiar pattern which had been followed at Sabarmati Ashram earlier.

Two Americans who later interviewed him were told what he had in mind from the very start: 'To show that a decent society can be constructed, even in India's most backward village.' He established the beginnings of a Spinners' Association – composed almost wholly of women; he founded the All-India Village Industries Association. A young couple, Aryanayakam and Asha Devi, helped initiate a school which would provide a new kind of education, 'from the moment a child is conceived in the mother's womb, to the moment of death.'

Students flocked to the school from nearby villages. Others came from great distances to join the ashram membership.

Sevagram was to become a laboratory, in which Gandhi's concepts of society, religion, education, *Satyagraha* would be tested and proven practicable.

He meant to demonstrate that it was possible to decentralize the movement for India's statehood, removing leadership from the great cities and spreading it throughout the land, in its seven hundred thousand villages, where the bulk of the population lived. It would be the peasant, the Untouchable, who finally would have charge of plans and activities aiming toward 'Swaraju,' or statehood, under a new constitution. Sevagram Ashram was to be the beginning; eventually it would be the model for all the country.

This was his answer to those who had believed his 'course has run.'

Soon there were enough huts to form a village in itself. A large proportion of the membership was composed of women and girls, as had been the case in Sabarmati Ashram earlier. Mrdulla Sarabhai – whose aunt and father were Gandhi's friends – Maniben Patel – whose father had become a Gandhi follower as far back as 1916 – the daughters of Harilal Gandhi – who lived with their grandmother once more – were among the members.

Sarojini Naidu and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit were not formally members of the ashram family, but as always they were closely associated with its whole programme. Sushila Nayyar, too, was deeply interested in it; she planned to devote herself to work in the villages as soon as she won her degree as physician. Another

woman – Rajkumari Amrit Kaur – came to the ashram, obviously moved by its work, though she seemed unable to decide whether to join as member.

There were two other women of exceptional value: Shentaben, a Hindu, who gave up her teaching position and her wordly possessions for a life of poverty; and the wife of Dr. Aryanayakam. Shentaben made instruction in diet and sanitation her chief tasks at the ashram and was later to help found a co-operative movement which would become a basic social implement of the village people. Mrs. Aryanayakam, like her husband, had been on the faculty of Tagore's famous university. He had degrees from Columbia University; she had been educated in India. She was a Brahmin and a Hindu; he was a Christian. They came to Sevagram as volunteer teachers, to establish a new kind of school, on Gandhi's precepts. They lived in a one-room hut, which was also made the school. Gandhi's philosophy of education – as a process which must begin in the womb before a child is born, and must continue to death itself – was the foundation of their teaching in the new school. Students flocked to them, many from nearby villages, spending the day at classes and in work within the whole ashram programme, and returning home at night. Those who arrived from great distances became members of the ashram membership.

The school itself soon was a model on which other institutions were established. Madam Aryanayakam's son died of malaria, contracted because of Sevagram's unwholesome climate. She did not leave her work after he died. Her daughter, after graduating from university, became one of the ashram membership.

27

RAJKUMARI AMRIT KAUR

THE PASSING of Annie Besant, in 1933, had meant little to India. Gandhi had found women of his own people to accept leadership. During the Salt War he had made heroines even out of women living in purdah. On 25 October 1936,

Harijan published his credo carried to its logical conclusion: The laws of Manu, which subject women to appalling degradation, must be expurgated.

As for Untouchables, so also for women, did he challenge religious faith itself. He believed that women could, and should, occupy the highest positions in the land. Under his stern tutelage, many were prepared for tasks which were to shape the history of their country. Among them was Rajkumari Amrit Kaur.

A woman of forty-seven, she entered the ashram in 1936. Her uncle was the maharajah of Karputhala, a small principedom consisting of perhaps three hundred square miles, with a population of less than three quarters of a million people; but the ruler possessed power of life and death over his subjects. His income was large, coming from cotton-weaving, silk-making, sugar manufacture, valuable products in a rich export trade. Jullundar, where the maharajah had his palace, was in the foothills of Punjab. The climate required a hardy race, capable of enduring enervating heat part of the year, and long rains, first at Christmas season and again during the monsoons lasting from June to September. The British had found the warlike Punjabi, whether Sikh or Hindu, hard to subdue, but very valuable later as military forces for the Empire's use.

Amrit Kaur's father was a member of the powerful Singh family. She grew up amidst the typically lavish splendour of a potentate's household, with slaves to obey her lightest wish. Women were kept in strict purdah, and when obliged to go outdoors swathed themselves from head to feet in thick veils and shawls. Since in many parts of Punjab modern civilization scarcely existed, women were held, not only as chattels, but as creatures existing solely for a man's pleasure or use.

Missionaries had come to Punjab in the early 1880's, however. Although the lot of a girl child was often tragic, since to remain unmarried was considered such a disgrace that it was a common practice to marry off a female at birth, the Christian converts provided their daughters freedom from the traditional life of the harem. Amrit Kaur's father adopted the Christian faith, and he brought up his sons and only daughter in it. When she reached adolescence, she remained unmarried, though members of his family had promised her, it was said, to the

leading Sikh of the country, the ruler of Patala, as member of his harem. Her father sent her abroad to be educated, first at the Sherborne School for Girls and then at another school in London. Unlike Sarojini Naidu, she was not a precocious scholar and gifted writer; her interests were in games and in sports. She became a star tennis player, winning many championships. She returned to Jullundar, a tall young girl, slender but strong, one of the feminine athletes of a new century.

For girls sent abroad to study it was always a difficult problem to readjust themselves on returning home. There were lovely cities in Punjab – Lahore, Amritsar, Salem – with temples and universities and exquisite gardens, but home was different from London and the girls she had known there as schoolmates and friends. Amrit Kaur, however, vigorously set herself the task of introducing sports among her friends at home; she arranged that matches be held at Simla and Lahore, and herself won prizes in competitions as she had in England. She found it easy to return to the magnificence and ease of her father's court. But she did not marry, as the years passed.

There were those who did not forgive her father for adopting Christianity. But among his friends was the great leader Gokhale. In her father's palace the young princess learned to share Gokhale's hopes for their country's freedom. She wrote, long after he died, an account of her friendship with Gandhi, through him:

Gokhale was an honoured friend at my father's, and often used to stay at our home. The flame of my passionate desire to see India free from foreign domination was early fanned by him . . . He once said: 'One day, you will I hope see a man who is destined to do great things for India.' The man was Gandhi.

With this in the back of my mind, I seized the very first opportunity to be presented to Gandhi. This was in 1915, at the Bombay Conference, the first Congress I attended . . .

Gandhi was more or less an unknown factor in the political life of India at the time. The tumultuous ovation went to the great Tilak (a Punjabi). Gandhi spoke only a few words about Indians in South Africa.

With no loudspeaker, his speech was inaudible except to those on the dais or in the front rows. But there was a quiet strength, an earnestness and a deep humility about him that went straight to my young heart . . . I feel I have owed allegiance to him and to his cause from that time on, though circumstances did not permit me actually to join him, until many years later.

Gandhi had only just arrived from South Africa, when she first heard him that day. Sarojini Naidu had herself met him only the year before. Rajkumari Amrit Kaur was occupied with the pleasures, and with the duties as well, of a rajah's daughter. She was busy teaching his servants to accept the English concept of sports even for women. She did not forget the poor. She went to great receptions, durbars, dinners. She travelled. But the small brown man, whom she had heard speak, was not forgotten.

During the Amritsar riots, after the tragedy in the gardens there, Gandhi was badly hurt; friends hurried him to the home of her father for sanctuary. She came to know him personally then. Her feeling of admiration for him deepened. But, although like thousands of others in India she was profoundly stirred by what had happened to her people, she remained outside his work, contributing funds but not otherwise participating.

One day he called on her father, and found her at home; she was ill, and he paid his respects to her for a few moments. Why, he queried with his curiously charming and disarming smile, did she not give him all her 'foreign finery to burn, and then take to khadi'?

She denied that she had 'much foreign finery.' She assured him that she 'now bought only native silks.'

'That,' he returned, 'is finery, too.'

'Burning,' she retorted, 'is quite wrong.'

He asked then: 'Not even when these things stand for the chains of our slavery?' He urged her: 'If you will not burn, at least give it to me. And I will send it to the poor Indians of South Africa. And you will take to spinning and weaving!'

She laughed in reply. The words he spoke 'fell on more or less stony ground,' she admitted. Nonetheless, when he left she did try to wear khadi, presently. But she found it 'too coarse for fastidious tastes.' There were not available then the fine Andhra and Bihar muslins which later were to come from domestic

textile plants. Yet – because his words somehow ‘carried power in them’ – she learned how to spin and weave. She gave the yarn to the poor, for cloth. And she began to use khadi herself, ‘for dusters, towels, any rough use in the house.’

She gained an insight into the truth of what Gandhi had said; using the rough homespun brought her into contact, as she had never been before, with common people of the country. When she would hear detractors say of Gandhi, ‘He uses khadi as a doormat,’ she knew that they ‘wronged him and all that khadi stood for.’

She saw him become ‘the idol of the people.’ Millions followed him. Friends of hers, men and women both, became his disciples. But she herself never went further than to help him with funds when he needed them, as during the Salt Tax struggle.

She had grown absorbed in the cause of freedom for India’s women, accepting the office of secretary in the All-India Women’s Conference. In 1932 she gave evidence, in London, as president of the organization. She retained the office through 1933. But she had not been one of those to battle publicly as had the women in their khadi gowns. She had remained apart.

It took more than twenty years, before she was prepared to become his disciple. When he opened Sevagram, she decided not very long after its establishment to enter as member. She saw in the colony a means of creating a promise of freedom for her sex, and of teaching the people how to live healthier lives, through the use of medicine and modern sanitary measures. She gave an address before Indian National Congress, urging that every man and woman in the country volunteer a certain number of hours every week to teach the peasants of his or her nearest village. The men might instruct the villagers in first aid, cleanliness of public roads, reading or writing; the women could teach sewing and weaving and cooking, the care of children, the care of a home. There must be, she said also, provision for education of the women in India. Although schools for boys were ‘pitifully inadequate,’ those for girls were all but non-existent. There must be an end to child marriages, and to polygamy and to the bearing of children by child wives.

All these things in which she had come to believe were part of the programme of Sevagram. She put aside her palace life, and enrolled as member.

For her, Gandhi with his customary disregard for consistency set aside all his stern rules imposed on other new members. There was not imposed on Amrit Kaur that immediate grim acceptance of ashram hardships as there had been on Miraben. Later, Rajkumari Amrit was to remember, with amusement:

I was not even to wash up my own dishes, etc. . . .

I was willing to do everything, and pleaded with Gandhi to be allowed to do so . . . But, while he has an enviable capacity of drawing people to him (he) has also the even greater capacity of keeping them with him . . .

It is because he leads gently over the rough places that he evokes complete loyalty.

Nevertheless, she learned that he could be grim enough, when he felt the time had come to cease coddling and shielding her, maharajah's daughter though she was.

The job assigned her was to serve as his first 'English language secretary.' His correspondence as always was mountainous; it was estimated that a hundred and sixty notes were written by his own hand, and literally thousands by Desai and Pyarelal for him, every week. There were, besides, his editorials, articles and public statements. The work given Amrit Kaur was a challenge.

To visitors particularly from the United States and England, it was unbelievable, when they were told that the woman kneeling reverently before Gandhi – taking down every word he spoke with utmost deference – was 'a princess.' Like Miraben and the other maidens and women, she too kissed his hand on meeting him and touched his feet with her slim fingers before leaving him.

Leaders from over the world came to him constantly; it was necessary for him to do two or three things simultaneously – to eat, and hold a conference with a colleague; to bathe – while giving an interview to a newspaperman; to dictate – and read a report from abroad. He never forgot a name, a face, a fact, though he was nearly seventy. He did not forgive those who failed in any way, however dear they were to him. Amrit Kaur learned that he could be most merciless with those whom he loved best.

She saw him wash the sores of a leper at the ashram, and

comfort. the sick and bereaved. He was tender and considerate with her in the early days of her coming. But he did not spare her ' castigation ' when he felt the occasion required it. He had given her a slip of paper to hand to a man; she gave it to another man by mistake. He scolded her roundly, without mercy. She burst into tears. But, as she told herself, ' Tears do not move him! ' He only observed: ' Tears are a token not of sorrow but of anger and pride. And the first principle of non-violence is infinite humility.'

She went about for days, with her head bowed. When Gandhi told her she was to accompany him on a trip to the villages, she knew that she would take his dictation as one who no longer had faith in herself. Gandhi seemed unable to forgive. But, when they stopped at the village where the party would remain overnight, a note came to her from him:

An ideal secretary keeps her chief straight when he is going astray . . . She hovers over him, watches all movements about him . . . picks up his papers, even those torn . . . lest he might have torn something important, by mistake. . . . She leaves after him and seeks what he left behind . . . and if not owned by anyone else, collects it . . .

Follow the spirit of this note and you will be the ideal secretary . . . This is my birthday present, which goes loaded with all the good wishes that I am capable of conveying. . . . Love, Bapu.

He had learned it was her birthday; this was his manner of making it happy for her. She was to treasure his letter to the day he died. He had shown her she must be his comrade in work, and because he expected the ' ideal ' of her, she must attain it. This was the lesson he gave her.

They became close friends after that day. He confided to her once: ' I did not send my sons to school and they have a grudge against me perhaps for not having given them opportunity to pass examinations and receive so-called higher education.' He could not forget that Harilal hated him. But, though he had created a school at the ashram, while long ago he had accorded his smallest sons no more than sketchy talks now and again on his way to his train, he felt no guilt concerning the past. He expected perfection of others; he often found excuses for himself.

He was not even always consistent about things concerning which he felt very deeply.

These were failings which made him lovable, human, to Amrit Kaur as to others. An American girl, Nilla Cram Cook, left the ashram after two years because, as she declared, 'Gandhi is a tyrant.' But Muriel Lester returned from England time and again to work with him. Amrit Kaur, though she left now and then to be with her brother at Simla, invariably came back to her job.

There were very human rivalries, as always, among those whom Vincent Sheean was to name, with good humour, 'The Gandhi Girls,' the feminine ashramites. Gandhi himself always tried to reveal no favouritism. He would stroke the cheek of this young girl disciple, pat an elderly female member on the head, place a kindly hand on the shoulder of an old woman who was a faithful follower. But on Christmas Day, in 1936, there appeared an article by him, in *Harijan*. He confessed that:

In a dream, as I slept, there came to me the desire to see a woman, for the first time in forty years.

He was an Oriental. This was not something to hide, but to ponder over. He did not hesitate to discuss it with ashram members, even with the women and girls. Those who were of his own people could understand him; perhaps they felt him more comprehensible as a man because he confessed to the weakness of other men, although he was a Mahatma. Nevertheless, for some time after he had his erotic dream he refrained from putting an arm on the shoulders of the young girls when they walked with him, and he did not pat the heads of the older women as they came to him. It troubled him profoundly that he who had chosen to live in utter celibacy could not command his imagination even in sleep.

He did not cease to speak with the women and girls in complete candour, however. Intellectually, he remained untouched by desire other than that of the mind, whether with man or woman comrades. And the women on their part showed no embarrassment with him. They accepted the plane of relationship he set for them.

They came of many different backgrounds. There was his adopted daughter, child of an Untouchable family. There was Mrdulla Sarabhai, whose father was the owner of a great mill

near Gandhi's first followers in India, the famed lawyer Patel. There were, besides, those who, although they were not formally members of the ashram, nevertheless worked in closest co-operation with it. Among them were Madam Naidu and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and her sister Krishna, an active co-worker also, though not so devoted as the older women. Kamala Nehru – wife of Jawaharlal Nehru – was one of the most dedicated of Gandhi's disciples. Sushila Nayyar, the sister of Pyarelal, came often to the ashram while she was studying medicine. If there was jealousy among the women and girls, it did not diminish the value of their work nor lessen the often extraordinary importance that work had for India. Amrit Kaur had the status of a rajah's daughter, and many of the others came from backgrounds of great wealth also; all cheerfully accepted hardship, even deprivation, as workers at Sevagram. Many had experienced prison terms, again and again.

Of them all, Mrdulla Sarabhai and Sushila Nayyar saw Gandhi with clearest, perhaps with sometimes critical, eyes. Sarojini Naidu, to be sure, called him 'Mickey Mouse,' teased him about his appearance and his grim insistence on sacrifice on the part of all others for his cause; but she believed utterly in him and the cause. Mrdulla, however, told him frankly, in her wholesome, firm voice, 'I'm no Gandhi-ite, remember!' It was the work, not the leader, which held allegiance. He loved to have her say this; his laughter would ring out in appreciation. Had he not insisted that Miraben understand it must be the work, not himself, which should be cherished? Sushila Nayyar herself felt most close to Kasturba, whom she had loved since first meeting her, as a child of twelve. Gandhi liked this, also. He spoke to her, often, with warm humour. Once he said to her: 'I can laugh even with those who laugh at me. That's what keeps me young! Because I have a loving Father in God. So long as He guides my footsteps, I do not care what people say about me.'

Kamala Nehru was one of the followers who gave him a thoughtful, reverent devotion. She had an almost ethereal fragility, her face with its delicate mouth showing clearly its sculptured, beautifully modelled structure of bones. She had never been well since her prison term in 1930, during the Salt

War. In 1936 she died, a young woman, martyred to Gandhi's cause.

But neither her husband, nor her sisters-in-law, left the tasks they had undertaken, despite their grief. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit had grown into a woman with beauty surpassing even that of her girlhood. Unlike Sarojini Naidu, she retained her slender figure. The Kashmir features were unmarred, though she was the mother of three children, now in their teens. In her was expressed the whole new generation of women trained to take leadership of the country. She was a feminist, as had been Olive Schreiner long ago; she was a gifted speaker, like Sarojini Naidu, an orator who could electrify her audience, bringing a multitude to its feet. She was an excellent administrator, as she had proved in the office to which she was elected in 1935, as chairman of the Education Committee of the Allahabad Municipal Board. Yet she remained intensely feminine, aware of her power as much through personal beauty as through her passionate convictions. And in 1937 she became an active symbol of a Gandhi victory.

The 'Act of India' had been passed by the Government in 1935, giving a constitution to the 'United Provinces,' a provincial constitution, while the promise of statehood still remained unfulfilled. There would be certain officials elected in the provinces. Eleven states were to be under British rule, and five hundred princedoms would be gathered together into one union. Gandhi accepted what was proposed, since to do otherwise was useless at the time.

In April 1937 the first elections were held.

The constitution was at most a makeshift. But the people of India were thrilled to the heart by an opportunity to vote, for the first time in India's history. For Gandhi, however, the proposed elections would be a test of his own power in the provisional government which had been established.

He had candidates from among his followers, in each of the eleven British-governed states. Ashram members went forth to electioneer for these candidates. The returns were counted. Gandhi's followers were victorious in eight of the eleven states. It was a resounding victory for a man who not so long ago had been believed 'a spent force' among his people.

But what made his triumph even more striking was the fact

that among those of his disciples who were elected was a woman – Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, who was chosen to represent her constituents in the United Provinces Assembly. Gandhi had been laughed at when he asked that women be given full equality with men – it was known that ‘a woman’s only gate to Heaven is through a man.’ But he had chosen a woman of India to take his place as head of the Indian National Congress, even a score of years ago. And now India itself, in the first election it was privileged to have, chose from among its people a woman to serve as one of the first elected officials of the government.

The London *Times* itself acknowledged his victory, ‘through the votes of millions of people who never had the vote before.’

28

SUSHILA NAYYAR

NEWS OF GANDHI’s victory did not please Winston Churchill. Too much power was reflected in the triumph of the little brown man.

But England had matters of more immediate concern to occupy the public mind. George the Fifth had died. His eldest son was to be crowned King and Emperor, choosing the name Edward the Eighth.

His coronation would be celebrated with splendour surpassing that of Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. He had been Victoria’s favourite great-grandson, as a little boy. He had charmed the dominions of her empire over the years in which he grew into a charming young man, and through his later years as debonair man of the world. Princes and statesmen were to offer him homage, as their new sovereign.

Not a word was published in England concerning the new ruler’s absorption in Mrs. Simpson, an American woman in her forties – divorced and remarried. But there were whispers that Queen Mary would not approve such a marriage and that the Church of England – though the King was its head – would never sanction it. In other lands the romance was viewed as a

delicious story, a titillating romance. Gandhi made no public statement, naturally; the story for him could not have reflected all that he rejected in his personal life and in his ashram members' lives.

Gandhi's health collapsed after the elections. It was necessary for him to be apart from people, to have absolute quiet and devoted nursing. Miraben had discovered in herself 'a tremendous struggle' – her 'greatest longing' was 'to live in a village with Bapu.' She realized that 'since the days of Sabarmati Ashram, that was my heart's desire.' What happened in England, and perhaps even what took place in the elections of India, could have no real meaning to her, hungry as she was to see and serve Gandhi, to live near him and spend herself upon his service. She was chosen to be his nurse and to have sole responsibility for making him well again.

In December, 1936, news exploded over the earth that the King Emperor would abdicate. His brother was crowned as George the Sixth. Edward, now Duke of Windsor, married Mrs. Simpson in June, 1937. Some saw a betrayal of the Empire for a royal whim; some read a story of deathless love...

To Madeleine Slade, what happened in England could have had small meaning, amidst the grave responsibility of bringing back the health of Gandhi. To Kasturba Gandhi, the royal romance very possibly was not even told. Sevagram was much isolated from the world.

Sushila Nayyar, studying medicine at the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, heard from her brother Pyarelal of the pilgrimage made by Kasturba Gandhi and Mahadev Desai's wife to the temple at Puri.

Gandhi would accept no office, no rewards, under the new government, but he saw to it that standards of honesty, selflessness, low pay were striven for by those elected; he meant to see enacted laws ensuring free education for all, the rights of labour, and the right of every Untouchable to enter all places of worship. The word 'native' was to be erased from official vocabulary, as pariah and outcast were to be superseded by his own term, Harijan, child of God. A group of ashramites went with him one day to a meeting, where he spoke, as he did as often as he could, on his ideal for the future. As it happened, near by the place of the meeting was a temple famed for its

shrines. Kasturba, who was, as Sushila Nayyar knew, 'a very religious little lady' with 'a living faith in the deities of the temples,' persuaded Desai's wife to come with her and offer worship to one of the gods, Lord Haganeth. The two women returned at twilight. When Gandhi heard where they had been, he exploded in fury. The Puri temple was forbidden to Untouchables. All that he was struggling to teach India to believe and to practise was denied by this place to which his wife had gone.

Sushila learned later that Kasturba was obliged to 'face the music.' Gandhi, a hand on his wife's slight shoulder, walked her into the dusk, asking what excuse, if any, she had for what had been done. As innocently as a child, she said she had erred and asked his forgiveness; his wrath evaporated instantly. As he did when his people failed to live up to the ideals he set for them, so did he now say to her, also, that he was the one at fault: 'The fault is mine. I became your teacher, but I did not give you the time and attention I ought to have given. I left your education incomplete. So what could you do?'

Toward Desai, however, there was not forgiveness. Desai was as a son to him, not merely a secretary and co-worker. He confronted the young man harshly: 'My failure I have confessed, Mahadev – but you and your wife are an extraordinary couple. You are friends – and why then have you neglected her education?'

His own previously inflexible requirement of continence between married couples had been relaxed because, as he told Horace Alexander, he had found 'not everyone has the vocation for celibacy.' But between Desai and his charming, fine wife prevailed a devout adherence to the vow of Brahmacarya. How could Desai, who had taught his wife to live so nobly, permit her to betray now the very foundation of the work for India's future, work which already in six provinces controlled by Congress gave Untouchables full equality in employment, politics and religion?

No excuses, no extenuating circumstances, were permitted to be cited by Desai. He was made to feel so base that he presently declared himself no longer fit to remain as Gandhi's secretary. The Mahatma would not hear of this, but a storm of letters flew between him and the young man, culminating in Desai's

publication of an abject account of the whole matter in *Young India*, with full assumption of blame for what his wife and Kasturba had done.

The incident so disturbed Gandhi that he was for a time literally ill. Sushila Nayyar, visiting the ashram, could see no mark of guilt on Kasturba's face, however; and the Mahatma appeared to bear no anger toward her.

He was soon himself again, outwalking the young men of the ashram, working his secretaries to exhaustion. Amrit Kaur was kept busy translating articles, news-stories, letters, from English into Gujarati. Pyarelal – and of course the faithful Desai also – took down letters, articles, comments, and also every word spoken at conferences between the Mahatma and visitors, so that a record would be available for future consideration and action.

So much mail came to the ashram that Gandhi himself was obliged to admit the need of a post office, finally. A telephone was installed, and even a road was cut, because of the urgent requests for these conveniences from visitors coming from all over the world to see him. But insofar as he could, he saw to it that Sevagram members continued to live no more comfortably than the Untouchables in the nearby village.

However, those who believed him a fanatic, a bigot, could not have been more mistaken. Amrit Kaur's face, habitually austere and rather severely withdrawn, would become childlike and sweet as he talked with her. A young teacher who had given up her job to work with Gandhi, on being asked once why she came out of his workroom singing, laughed: 'We are always happy when we are with Bapu!' A man who knew Gandhi well said: 'Being with Gandhi is like being at a party and Gandhi is the life of the party.'

Yet toward those who failed to meet the standards he set, he was often pitilessly hard. A friend of his wrote:

Take him or leave him . . . He is as cross-grained as a hickory nut . . . His destiny is to be misunderstood . . . But the Mahatma's personality is purposefully earnest, even at its most divergent . . . He can be uplifting yet irritating; he can be kind then instantly strict and severe.

But it was always because his 'purpose,' and not the individual,

counted first for him. To his wife alone did he reveal a gentleness, a tenderness, even when she did not quite reach the level he set. This he had learned, in their old age. He had not 'educated' her, as he should have done, sufficiently.

Although she was nearly three score and ten years old, she worked as hard as her strength permitted, and usually beyond it. Once there had been forty huts in the ashram; now there were hundreds, among them a number which housed organizations reflecting how much India centred about the small brown man in his loincloth. There were, in addition to his favourite groups – the All-India Spinners' Association, composed largely of women, and the Village Industries Association, established to further Khadi work – now also a National Language Association, and an Anti-Untouchability Association as well. Keeping the ashram immaculate was not made easier by a constant flow of visitors – from statesmen to peasants, from women tourists to reporters.

There even came in 1938, an old friend of Gandhi's, Herman Kallenbach, the wealthy South African Jew who had abandoned his business to help fight the South African Indian cause and who had helped to establish Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix Farm. Gandhi and he, meeting after more than twenty years, were 'like a pair of school-boys,' thought the ashramites. Kallenbach remained for some time. He was profoundly disturbed by what was happening to his people in Germany. But Gandhi insisted that even against Hitler there should be practised *Satyagraha*, resistance without violence only.

It was the method he meant to use in a matter about which his friend Patel wrote to him from Rajkot, Gandhi's boyhood town. It appeared that the rajah, after the Untouchables had been promised redress of injustices, had gone back on his word. Could the Mahatma come to see what might be done, asked Patel. Gandhi went, and was quickly imprisoned for civil disobedience through *Satyagraha*.

No sooner did Kasturba hear of this than she, with two ashram girls – Mrdulla Sarabhai and Maniben Patel – set forth for Rajkot, where they, too, were gaoled. Although in prison Kasturba found herself denied small comforts and even medical care – formerly always provided her – she did not make her wants known, believing that all must be endured to follow her

husband's ideal of 'a non-violent soldier of freedom.' When Sushila Nayyar and Devadas Gandhi came to visit the gaol, they were shocked to learn that she had not been given care when ill; the community forced the authorities to move the women prisoners to another place – an ancient palace, perhaps a dozen miles from where Gandhi himself was being held. Kasturba was quite content, she told Sushila when the medical student came again; she had the two young ashramites with her, and there was a nice garden. She had never minded gaol at all.

The girl dreaded telling her reason for coming. Only that morning Devadas had asked her to see his mother, because a letter had come to say that Gandhi was fasting, 'in repentance' for having failed to persuade the rajah to keep his promises to the Untouchables.

Kasturba, hearing what her visitor had come to tell her, lifted a small face pinched with anxiety. She said, 'But you should have told me at least a fast was under consideration.'

'Bapu only told his plan in a letter which did not arrive until this morning,' pleaded Sushila. 'He left no time for argument.'

Kasturba did not reply. She turned to the prison attendant to say: 'No further meals are to be prepared for me. So long as Gandhiji's fast continues, I will take one meal a day, and it will consist of fruit and milk only.'

Gandhi sank rapidly. Early in March, 1939, the *New York Times* reported him as dangerously ill, a few days later he was said to be 'at the point of death.' His previous all but fatal fast had left him permanently weakened. But one day, without warning, Kasturba appeared by his cot, and to his whispered question, 'How did you get here?' she replied that the prison had told her she 'could leave if desired' – and she had promptly left, to come to him. The day through she sat beside him, giving him the few drops of water which alone he permitted himself to take during fasting. It was the first care he had received in prison at Rajkot. He had been taken to the National School, and simply kept there.

When dusk approached, he told Kasturba she must return to her cell. It was not right to abandon *Satyagraha*, even to look after him. And because he so wished, she returned to the old palace, and resumed her fasting there. But almost at once, she and the girls with her were told they could leave; Gandhi was

free. His fast had been effective. The Rajkot rajah accorded the Harijans their rights. But Gandhi's strength had completely collapsed as a result of the fast.

Sushila Nayyar received a message from Kasturba: could she come for a little time, for Gandhi was quite sick?

Immediately, the young medical student asked for a month's leave of absence from college, though she was preparing for examinations. She knew that Kasturba would ask her for help only after the native Aryurvedic physicians, the priests, had failed. She found Gandhi very ill. The fast and overwork, together with the cold season that had arrived – and which was particularly bitter in damp and cold at Sevagram – had raised his blood pressure to the danger mark.

But when she suggested that he sleep indoors instead of on the verandah, he would not hear of it. Miraben had been trying to care for him, but to oppose his lightest wish was for her impossible. Sushila Nayyar knew it was her task to be firm, as Miraben could not be. Yet who was able to force the Mahatma to do anything he did not choose to do?

Miraben quickly changed her hut, offering it to Bapu so that he could have rest and quiet. But when he was told of this he answered in vexation, 'Why should alterations have been made, without consulting me?' He insisted that 'the hut is for Miraben to carry out her Khadi work.' He declared that he 'would rather occupy my corner of the big hall' if he had to leave the verandah at all. Nonetheless, as Sushila said to herself, 'The only suitable place is the one prepared by Miraben,' though nobody had the courage to suggest he must sleep there.

The twenty-year-old student admitted to herself that she – like the others – was 'in a dilemma.' How does one tell a man worshipped almost as a god that he must sleep indoors, if he is to get well? Nobody ventured to utter a word.

Just then Kasturba tripped in, heard what was being discussed, and promptly said: 'Bapu shall come to my hut.' He did not say a word. The matter – saw Sushila – was 'settled then and there' for him, as for the rest.

During his illness Kasturba continued her customary tasks. How she found a place to sleep in her crowded hut, she did not explain. Sushila would see her hurry to join the others in evening prayers and hymns; sometimes she would lead in an

ancient chant remembered from Porbandar Town childhood days, and at other times she would patiently accept the singing of Christian hymns such as Miraben and Amrit Kaur both knew and loved. After the prayers Kasturba would go back to rub her husband's feet until he fell asleep.

Although she adored her small grandson Kanu – who was visiting her – and to the little boy she was 'all in all,' Kasturba made plain that her first thought was for Gandhi. When he was asleep, she usually studied 'the morning prayer' for the next day, so that she would have it by heart; this also she did for her husband. At leisure moments during the day or in the evening, she studied her Gujarati primer, her small grandson telling her how to read the words.

Sushila loved the old woman, her quickness, her devotion, her honesty.

The month's leave of absence lengthened into a half year; Gandhi still remained very sick. The charts Sushila prepared showed that his blood pressure rose dangerously whenever he was tired; and sick though he was he did not spare himself.

Meetings were held by Congress members. Subhas Chandra Bose – one of those insisting on military action against Britain – was chosen president. Gandhi, although not even a member now of the organization, saw to it that Bose was put out of office.

He was gravely concerned by Germany's treatment of Kallenbach's people. It seemed to him that he must make known to the Jews that if they offered *Satyagraha* justice would come to them. But he was not well enough to do what he would have wished to do to preach this. The world seemed to press down upon him, the small old man in his white-painted mud hut in central India.

Sushila Nayyar saw Kasturba look at her husband with eyes deep sunken because of anxiety. Returning to medical college was impossible, the girl knew, until Gandhi should recover. Her tiny figure, not much taller than Kasturba's, her heart-shaped face with its grave eyes and mouth became part of the ashram picture, as months went on.

Then Gandhi became so ill that she dared not trust her incomplete medical knowledge. She called in a doctor. He ordered the invalid to be taken, at once, to 'another climate – the seashore at Juju, preferably.'

Miraben became 'completely distraught.' Other ashramites asked, terrified, 'Will he come back?'

But Kasturba went to work, gathering his clothing, blankets, mattresses, pots and pans; she took him to Juju, where she cooked his food, washed and fed him, swished flies from him so that he could sleep undisturbed, and in two months had him well enough to be back at Sevagram.

There he was put in her own small hut, as before. She made 'an ideal nurse,' thought Sushila, who of course had been with them at the seashore. One morning, shortly after returning, as the young student took his temperature, she saw him glance about the hut, as if he saw it for the first time. He seemed to be in a reminiscent mood. Later, she wrote down what he said to her:

Poor Ba . . .

She has never had a room to herself . . . This hut, I had constructed especially for her use . . . I myself supervised all the details, I thought she would have some comfort and privacy in her old age . . . And now I have taken possession of it, myself . . .

Even before, she was not the sole occupant of her hut . . . She gave shelter to several young girls coming to the ashram . . . But, my coming means that she has had practically to give it up altogether, for wherever I go the place becomes like a public inn.

His voice, it seemed to Sushila, changed a little, as he continued:

It hurts me. But I admit Ba has never complained about it. I can take from her whatever I like. I can impose upon her any guests I like. She always bears with me, willingly and cheerfully.

His tone somehow made Sushila turn about, and she saw that Kasturba had entered, silently. Gandhi, without halting, chuckled now:

Well, that is as it should be, Ba! If the husband says one thing and the wife another, life becomes unbearable. Here – the husband has only to say a thing and the wife is ready to do it –

They all laughed. Sushila knew that the old husband and wife loved one another and that she loved them both.

She had become one of Gandhi's followers at last. And it had

begun when she discovered Kasturba as a friend, in young girlhood. The stay at Sevagram had lengthened to two years. But it was safe to leave Bapu to Kasturba. Sushila returned to college. She plunged into study, in order to prepare for an internal course at the Lady Harding Hospital.

One day, she made a visit to the ashram. A cholera epidemic had broken out in the village, she was told. Because the peasants were constantly coming to Sevagram, she offered to innoculate the members. Gandhi approved, but nobody else spoke. Kasturba announced after a moment: 'I'm not going to take the injection, come what may.'

'Those who will not,' Gandhi said, 'may have to go into quarantine.'

She would not change her mind. Because of her, very few would accept innoculation, and only because Sushila persuaded all the villagers to be innoculated, was the ashram prevented from being wiped out. But Kasturba asked, had not those who *refused* innoculation done as well as they who accepted it? Modern members of the ashram could receive the filthy stuff into their veins if they chose. She would not. In matters of principle – wholly personal principle – she could decide for herself, particularly when only her life was at stake. Had she not done so in South Africa, many years ago?

* * *

War was proclaimed again, between Britain and Germany, on 3 September, 1939.

Within a few hours Chamberlain, the Prime Minister, announced India also as a belligerent. He had not consulted representatives of India before this announcement. A blaze of anger flamed over the whole land.

Gandhi declared his immovable opposition to India's participation in the war.

George the Sixth, King and Emperor, was a gentle, if rigid man. It was not he, however, but Chamberlain, who spoke for the realm now. Chamberlain announced that he demanded India's participation in aid of the Empire.

Two men, both leaders, both fighters, were in a war of their own.

Ten days after the outbreak of war, the Indian National Con-

gress decided that 'a free democratic India would gladly associate herself with other free nations for mutual aggression and for economic co-operation.' This was Nehru's idea; Gandhi disagreed with it.

He saw the Viceroy, Linlithgow, who warned him against 'letting India move too fast' in demands for statehood. In London, Muriel Lester saw the Minister of State in the India office and to him said: 'India is not bluffing, she will not aid the Empire without being assured of independence.'

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit prepared to leave for a tour of the United States, where, as unofficial spokesman, she would present the case of India as Gandhi saw it.

In the midst of the war between nations, there appeared the 1939 edition of *Who's Who in India*. Kasturba's name was included for the first time. A few statistics were quoted, the date of her birth, her marriage, her prison terms. The brief account concluded with. 'Has been head of the Women's Section of the Wardha Satyagraha Ashram, C.I.' Some slight recognition was at last accorded to the woman who had grown toward the height which her husband had demanded since their youth.

To Sushila Nayyar came a telegram shortly from Gandhi: 'Ba is ill.' Could she come to see Sushila? The priests whom she had consulted seemed not to be curing her illness.

29

KASTURBA

SUSHILA AGAIN put aside preparations for examination and work on her thesis. When her old friend arrived at the station, it was plain that she was indeed ill. Her ailment proved to be bronchial pneumonia; it was soon complicated by a chronic digestive disorder, from which she had long suffered. Sushila did not disguise her indignation; she wrote a note to ask why a sick woman had been sent alone on a journey. But Kasturba protested: 'Why the worry? They put me on the train, in care of passengers, and you met me at the other end. I

had only to keep sitting in the train. Did one need an escort for that?'

Her illness rapidly reached a crisis. Terrified, the student asked herself: 'How can I face Bapu if she does not recover?' From Gandhi letters came daily to the girl at her college and to Kasturba, daily letters full of love. She would brighten when each arrived, waiting for Sushila to read it to her aloud. Then she would put it under her pillow and later – putting on her big spectacles – she studied the pages herself, word for word.

It was the letters that saved her, believed Sushila. Devadas came with his whole family to take her back, a bundle of skin encasing tiny bones. Many months would be needed before she was fully recovered.

Sushila plunged again into study. But, as ever, she made a trip to the ashram at every possible opportunity. Her brother was always most deeply absorbed in work with Bapu, she saw. An editorial appeared in one of Gandhi's periodicals, entitled 'Foreign Soldiers.' He wished all British military forces out of India. He did not wish India to be used as a military police. Not even for the reward of statehood, would he agree to this.

A flood of reporters gathered about the ashram. For *Life* magazine, a writer took pictures of Gandhi, his hut, some of the ashramites, and his wife. Of her, the text said: '... a small frail figure ... sari over her head ... eyes framed in big spectacles ... a gentle and enduring spirit.' The writer had watched her as she sat at supper. It was her first meal in a long time. She 'has been very ill.' She sat beside her husband, though other women were apart from the male members.

Gandhi gave her choice bits of fruit and vegetables, as if to a beloved child. After supper, when he went out for a walk with his followers – his arms on the shoulders of two maidens proudly accepting this privilege – his wife remained behind. But when he returned and candles were lighted for a service of prayers and hymns, she sat with the rest, in the group facing the Mahatma. A roll call evoked from those present the amount of spinning each had done that day; she did not speak for herself. Prayers came once more; everyone left for bed. Gandhi went with some of his disciples to his small hut; his wife went with some young girls to hers. Next morning the reporter saw a princess on her knees, taking dictation from Gandhi. Men and women had

already come from their huts for breakfast, the women usually kneeling and placing their heads on Gandhi's feet. Then they all left for their tasks of the day. Gandhi's wife remained in her hut.

Sushila Nayyar knew that in the past Kasturba had always said good-bye to ashram visitors, even though she did not exchange a word with them throughout their stay. She had been the hostess, the aristocratic lady fulfilling her obligation to her husband's friends and co-workers. Now she was too tired to speak with others. It seemed as if the weight of her years had descended without warning on her frail shoulders.

In India there were many now who said: 'Though Sarojini Naidu and Vivaya Pandit have captured the mind of our people, Kasturba Gandhi has captured its heart.'

30

MIRABEN

Lord Linlithgow, the new Viceroy, met Gandhi on 29 June 1940 shortly after the Mahatma held a meeting at his ashram, with members of the Working Committee of the Congress. Gandhi had not been successful in persuading the Congress leaders to follow his *Satyagraha* programme further. The Viceroy, however, intimated that independence, in a much larger degree, would be accorded India for full participation in the Second World War. A week after the talk with Linlithgow, Gandhi was defeated in his effort to win the Congress over into throwing its full weight to aid for the Allies.

Gandhi declared: 'We can keep India intact only with good will toward the whole of the human family, and not merely for that part of the human family which inhabits this little spot of earth called India.' War was not the way, he repeated.

Nevertheless, Hitler was master of Denmark, Holland, Belgium, Norway. The Congress heads were certain that 'the time to strike against Britain is now.' Gandhi wrote in an article that he did not wish to have the great London cathedrals ruined

and the English people bombed. 'We do not seek our independence out of Britain's ruin,' he insisted. France fell next, however. And on 7 December 1941 Japan struck at Pearl Harbour. By March 1942 the Japanese had advanced on Burma, and war approached India thereby.

The British were meeting defeat, defeat, everywhere. In April 1942 Franklin Delano Roosevelt sent Harry Hopkins to urge the British Government not to permit a breakdown of negotiations which had been entrusted to Sir Stafford Cripps, who had been sent to win over India to the Empire's cause, in the hour of very great danger. Hatred seethed in India.

December 1938, Gandhi had written Miraben that her daily letter was 'an eagerly awaited event' for him now; she must keep her health and therefore live away from Wardha: 'I am prepared to risk your death . . . rather than you should return to Sageon to live.' It meant, 'never returning to live near Bapu,' a 'nightmare' for her. But she went to the Frontier Province to work as he wished. He came to visit the Frontier; she missed his visit and knew 'the sorrow in my heart became further accentuated.' His Rajkot Fast had been a profound anxiety to her. Gandhi wrote to her, late in 1940 that he was glad she had come to a 'new abode,' a solitary little hut on the mountainside. Since he wished her to 'work independently,' she did so, however lonely she was. 22 May 1941, however, he wrote to her, amazed and amused:

Your letter. An enquiry has come from London whether the report is true that you have severed all connection with me and are living from me!! How wish is father to the thought!

As you say if something drastic has to happen, it will do so even on some pretext . . . altogether flimsy.

War news continues to be sensational. The news about the destruction in England is heart-rending.

June 1941, she had returned to live about a half mile from his ashram at last. From Bardoli, he wrote her in December 1941, 'This is just to tell you that you are never out of my mind . . . I hope you are getting stronger and having greater inner peace.'

25 January 1941, she saw him, but did not have opportunity to say good-bye. She was desolated because 'never in all these years had I not touched Bapu's feet before he left for a journey,'

as she explained later in her book of his letters. He however told her, as so often he had done: ' You should be now above these outward demonstrations of affection, which is a permanent thing independent of outward manifestations. Let your work be your sole absorption.' But he assured her gently he was ' all right ' and that he was glad she was ' keeping fit.'

In April 1942, he was writing his leader for *Harijan*, ' Foreign Soldiers.' Later she thought it ' must have been practically the same hour when I wrote Bapu a long letter expressing almost exactly the same sentiments.' She added that, if he would agree, she ' would like to go to the All India Congress Committee ' to meet shortly to plead ' for nation-wide non-resistance to the Japanese.' He wired her to come at once.

Entering his study, she fell on her knees before him, and kissed his hand in greeting. Gandhi gave the permission asked for, then held out toward her a manuscript, asking her to ' read it and let me know if it appeals to you.' If she ' liked it,' he added he wanted her to take it, together with two letters, to the Committee, giving the letters and the manuscript to Nehru.

The tall woman kneeling before him glanced at the heading: ' Quit India.'

She read the pages through. This was not merely a request for ' an orderly withdrawal of British troops, for the good of England and India ' alike, such as had been made in a previous editorial, ' Foreign Soldiers.' The paper she held demanded that Britain get out of India, entirely and quickly.

It proposed a resolution to be passed by the Committee, stating that the Congress was:

anxious not to jeopardize the defensive capacity of the United Nations . . . but (is) no longer justified in holding back the nation from asserting its will, against an imperialist and authoritarian government, which dominates it, and prevents it from functioning in its own interest and the interest of humanity . . .

The Congress resolved therefore to sanction, for the vindication of India's inalienable right to freedom and independence, the starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines.

From Bose to Nehru himself, Gandhi had been meeting

opposition to *Satyagraha* now. Nevertheless, he proposed it again. Resistance must be offered, but without violence.

In a world battered by bombs and bloody in battles, the brutality of which had never been matched before, he insisted that his people continue to fight without ammunition. It was against Churchill that he led India. They were equal, these two men, both utterly fearless, utterly dedicated to the salvation of their people.

Even Sarojini Naidu admitted that while she hated Churchill for what he said and did, she could not but admire him for what he was. She told a Reuter reporter that she admired the Prime Minister for his generalship, his eloquence, but above all for his bravery, which could evoke an unquestioning responsive loyalty in his people, even unto the smallest child. She admired his eloquence, which made all England refuse to fly from the enemies in their skies, enemies flinging down bombs which destroyed them but did not conquer them.

Miraben was one of Churchill's own people. Her family had known his, and his greatly gifted cousin, Clare Sheridan, still remained one of Miraben's few friends in England. But it was the path which Gandhi revealed to her that she always followed. A writer dubbed her: 'Miraben, who followed the Light of Asia.' Had she not used the very word 'light,' when she spoke of discovering what Gandhi offered her, from the moment she first read of him in Rolland's book?

She folded the paper which Gandhi had handed to her, stooped to touch his feet with her forehead and kiss his hand in farewell. She hurried at once to the train for Bombay.

She arrived at the Congress Executive Meeting on time. The manuscript she carried was read aloud by Nehru. The Committee passed the resolution unanimously. With his people, even those who did not agree with him, Gandhi invariably won at the end.

Miraben, with the Committee, went now to the ashram. 'What are our marching orders?' they asked Gandhi.

He had a plan ready for the 'war without violence' against Britain. Each of them was to 'go home to his own province,' to 'prepare the masses for non-violent non-co-operation.' Every man promised to do this, in his own province; they all knew it meant arrest and prison, of course.

Gandhi turned to Miraben. He told her there were three things she could do: call on the Viceroy and try to reason with him; try to see the Governor General of India, for a like purpose; or go to Orissa – on the East Coast, where if the Japanese advanced there was danger of invasion – and there help the people to prepare for *Satyagraha* resistance to the possible enemy.

Unhesitatingly, she said: 'I choose the third.' She would give her life, if it proved necessary, as one of the soldiers in the campaign he had mapped out. Like Sarojini Naidu and Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, like Amrit Kaur and Mrdulla Sarabhai, like Sushila Pie and Maniben Patel – and countless other Indian women – she, the Englishwoman, was prepared to fight for Gandhi's people.

On 8 August she was with Madam Naidu, Pyarelal, Desai, Kasturba and the Mahatma in the Bombay mansion of G. D. Birla, an Indian millionaire who had become a follower of Gandhi twenty-two years ago and who always lent him his homes in various cities, as needed. Gandhi was to speak at an open-air meeting, just outside the city boundaries.

Gandhi rose to address the multitude that had gathered. There were always thousands who came when he spoke, whether in a metropolis or in a village. He spoke to those sitting silently on the earth before him, of the campaign which was to begin. His speech became famous as the 'Quit India speech.'

He and his friends returned to Birla's house. There they found Sushila Nayyar. She had won her degrees and was now Doctor Nayyar. The rest were amused, when she said that she had come because she somehow felt 'panicky.' She had arrived to find Kasturba left alone, 'as usual, doing something or other for Bapu.' She had gone by herself to hear Gandhi but arrived at the tail-end of his address, then hurried back to Kasturba. But now – it was not yet eight o'clock – they were all here together; she showed that she was embarrassed about her nervousness earlier.

Miraben and the others sat before Gandhi, as he led in prayer. Kasturba saw that he got to bed for some rest. Tomorrow – 9 August – they were all to leave, to begin preparing the people for 'mass Satyagraha.' But it was nearly midnight before Gandhi himself went to his own small room to sleep.

There was a shout from Desai; he believed he heard the telephone ringing. It was about one o'clock. Sushila and Miraben were disturbed, but Gandhi was not even wakened. Desai heard over the telephone, from friends who were calling, that the police meant to arrest Gandhi.

However, things became quiet again. Everyone fell asleep. At four Gandhi woke for morning prayer, as usual. He learned now for the first time of the warnings sent by telephone. He chuckled: 'They can't arrest me after my speech last night. The Government is not so foolish as to arrest the man who is their best friend in India today.' Everyone smilingly agreed. Was not he the one who had won his people to abandon plans for violence in resistance?

Kasturba turned to Sushila, to scold the young doctor: 'Why did you rush here? You could have completed your term, and then come to Sevagram -'

Not a half hour after prayers ended Desai flew into Gandhi's room. 'Bapu . . . Bapu,' he gasped, 'they've come!'

Through a tiny court on which Gandhi's room opened, police were tramping. Orders for Gandhi's arrest had been given them, long before his speech was made. It had been quiet after the first telephone call, because the wires were cut so that arrests could be made without warning.

Preparations for the *Satyagraha* campaign would be halted, before they even began, by the arrest of Gandhi and his disciples.

He asked Desai quite calmly: 'How long will they give me to get ready?'

'Thirty minutes at most,' came from the police.

Quickly, he began collecting his few possessions - his sandals, his watch, his spectacles, his ink bottle. Then he asked the others to join him in a brief prayer, Desai leading in singing a hymn. The police poured in now.

Warrants, it proved, had been brought not only for the Mahatma, but for Desai, Madam Naidu, and Miraben also. Pyarelal could come along, if he chose.

As he was led out, Gandhi called back to his wife: 'If you cannot live without me, you may accompany me - but I'd rather you stay behind and carry on my work.'

They all knew she would follow him as soon as she could. She

watched her husband, Desai, Madam Naidu, Miraben, and Pyarelal taken away. Sarojini Naidu's daughter was ill; she had left her only to hear Gandhi speak. She would not be permitted to see friends in prison, she was told; there would be no permission granted to receive or write letters to her family. What she gathered from her belongings in the room at Birla's house, would be all that she could have to wear in prison. Miraben was taken without even the opportunity to collect a change of garment. She had only the garb that she wore.

Madam Naidu, writing regally to the prison authorities, received word that her family might send her the clothing she needed. Miraben wrote to the Prison Inspector also asking for her clothing to be brought. No answer came to her.

31

SUSHILA, MIRABEN, SAROJINI AND KASTURBA

GANDHI'S ARREST stunned the city. Next day, Sushila Nayyar stood beside Gandhi's wife, hour by hour, as people streamed in to shake Kasturba's hand, to ask about Gandhi. The young doctor saw that her old friend was utterly exhausted, but when someone mentioned that Bapu was to have addressed an audience in Shivaji Park that evening, she instantly declared she would speak in his place. Word went swiftly to the police. Though the British Labour Party had immediately backed Gandhi's programme for Indian independence, Churchill was determined to show – as he was to say in a famous sentence within a few months – that he had 'not been appointed First Prime Minister by His Majesty, to preside over the Liquidation of the British Empire.' The police of Bombay sent warning that if Kasturba Gandhi tried to speak at a meeting she also would be arrested.

She would not hear of putting aside her decision. She and Sushila each packed a small bag for the trip. Before leaving, the old woman dictated two messages, one 'to the people in

general,' the other 'to the women,' and Sushila was impressed with her clarity and ease, 'the words came without effort,' as her old voice spoke what she wished to say:

... Gandhi poured out his heart before you for two and a half hours in the All-India Congress Committee meeting last night . . . What can I add to that? All that remains for us is to live up to his instructions. The women of India have to prove their mettle . . . They should all join in this struggle irrespective of caste or creed . . . Our watchword must remain, Truth and Non-Violence.

Her husband could not have found words more clear to speak to women like herself. Now she could go to talk for him, she said.

But as they stepped to the door, a policeman blocked their way to the automobile. He shouted, 'Mother, you're too old for these things. At your age, you should be at home. Please, don't go to the meeting.' His tone, it seemed to Sushila, ' sounded like mockery,' and she told herself, ' If anything befalls the old woman I shall go to the meeting myself and speak.'

Before they could move a foot forward in their car, policemen filled it. They were under arrest. The machine was turned toward Arthur Road Prison. Deep anxiety shadowed Kasturba's small face. The girl asked, gently, if she were worried. Tears rose in the wrinkled eyes but no answer was spoken. Sushila reached for her hand and found it was hot with fever, but when she tried to say something comforting, her friend cried out, ' They won't let us come out alive this time! Don't you see the Government is the very incarnation of evil? '

The girl said, coaxingly: ' Bapu will come out victorious as always.'

Their automobile had reached the prison. People passing seemed not to notice the two women taken through the gates. ' Don't they recognize us? ' the young doctor wondered. ' Are they not aware of what is happening to us? ' That whole day everyone had crowded to Birla's House; now nobody seemed even aware of them, and as the gates closed upon them, it was as if they were shut away from everyone.

A matron led them to their cell. ' Maximum security ' cots were brought. One look at the sheets evoked from Sushila a request that the cots be removed; she spread out the bedding on

the floor. Food was brought, but Kasturba would not eat; in a few moments she was asleep, completely tired out. Next morning, Sushila saw that her temperature had fallen to ninety-six degrees, and when the prison doctor made his rounds, she asked that a special diet be provided for her old friend. The answer was: 'You can buy what is needed, the gaol cannot supply such things.' Since they had taken only enough small change to pay for their trip to the Park, they had not money for food. The prison doctor said: 'Things are different this time.' He would not permit their friends to be asked for money: 'Our orders are that you're to have no direct contact with the outside world.'

The shy, bookish girl – wholly a scientist – found courage to write to him:

You must send me everything, from the hospital ...
After all, we could order special diets in our hospital,
and I expect you to do the same, here. If you cannot, I
request you to buy these things from your own pocket
and I shall pay you back some day when I am in the
position to do so.

He saw her then, and when he heard the twenty-year-old prisoner was a newly graduated doctor, he softened, promising medicine and some apples. The apples, arriving late in the day, were two in number. The girl asked herself: 'How make juice enough from two apples, and without implements for squeezing out the juice?'

The air was foul in the cell, into which leaked sewer gas from the drains. Permission to drag out their mattresses to the matron's verandah was finally won; but because no lavatory was near, it was necessary to drag the bedding back and to carry Kasturba also to the cell again. They were hungry. But the next day a woman – arrested as Gandhi-ite – offered her purse and the money it held, exchanging it for some of Sushila's saris, with the comment: 'If I die, I at least will leave no debts.' Some food could now be bought for Kasturba.

Unexpectedly, they were told that they would be taken to another place. Kasturba asked, was it to be Yeravda Prison, or where Gandhi had been sent? Reluctantly she was told: 'To him.' At the railroad station, officials passed to and fro busily, coolies haggled over prices as usual, passengers said good-bye,

children cried and laughed; nobody seemed to see the two women in charge of police. Kasturba broke out: 'Sushila – look. The world goes on as if nothing had happened. How will Bapuji win *swaraj*? '

Deeply moved, the girl said: 'God will help Bapu. All will be well.' They were hustled into a train. At the end of their journey – apart from all other people – they again were placed in a police car. A half hour's ride brought them to the gates of a large palace. Military guards let them in; fifty yards further, more guards opened a barbed-wire fence for them; the barbed-wire gates closed and their car drove on, to a verandah, which convicts were sweeping. The automobile was parked under the verandah.

They had been taken to the Poona palace of the Aga Khan, one of the fabulously rich rajahs who paid humble obeisance to the Empire in return for protection of their wealth and royal prerogatives. Kasturba managed to climb the verandah stairs, to ask a convict where her husband was being kept. 'The last room down the corridor,' she was told. She hurried past rooms planned for the pleasures of a potentate who enjoyed women, wine, food and costly race horses. Clutching Sushila's arm, she reached the last room. Gandhi was sitting on a cot, dictating a letter to Desai.

Desai, sensing the presence of others, turned about and exclaimed in greeting. Gandhi, however, glowered: 'Were you unable to bear the strain and so asked the Government to send you to your husband, Kasturba? '

Sushila tried to interpose that they had been in gaol and were sent here without warning. Kasturba herself put in: 'No! No! I did not make any requests. The Government arrested me and brought us down here!' Her husband's face cleared.

But a guard entered to order the women 'to check belongings' at the office. Kasturba would not hear of Sushila carrying both of the bags. Coming to her husband seemed to infuse her with new life.

All that first day she talked with him and Pyarelal, with Desai, and with Sarojini Naidu and Miraben. She peeped into the palace rooms. She discovered the kitchen. But after that, there was nothing for her to do. She could not, like Madam Naidu, write; she could not read, as did Miraben. She had not

the tasks of taking letters from Gandhi, as did his secretaries. She could not doctor, as did Sushila. Only in work with her small hands, did Kasturba have her life. And in prison even cooking was done by male convicts, not political prisoners.

In other prisons she had been permitted to see all kinds of inmates, to chat with them, hear their stories, watch them come and go. Here the political prisoners were a tiny group kept apart. The Government seemed in a panic, thought Sushila. Not even relatives were permitted to see Gandhi's followers. Kasturba was told that her sons and their children would not be permitted to have so much as a line from her; seeing them was out of the question also.

It was as if they had become ghosts to all the world outside the palace.

Kastuba began by being very active and interested, but as days passed she grew pale and frightened, in the total inactivity forced upon her. She tried at the beginning to sit beside her husband, fanning away flies and mosquitoes – which were a pest at the palace – so that he could have some sleep. Sushila told her she moved her fan to and fro 'as regularly as a machine.' But after a few days this effort seemed to lag, the young doctor noticed.

The Mahatma was busy, dictating letters to Lord Linlithgow, as if no prison could shut him away from those who depended upon his leadership. The letters which Desai and Pyarelal took down asked for permission to communicate with friends, not about political but personal matters, if the Government insisted on that. But the Congress was being arrested by many thousands; in six months there were to be forty thousand in gaol. Every effort was being made to keep Gandhi's war of *Satya-graha* to win independence from even starting. It had started, nonetheless, the moment he was put in the Poona palace.

In the prison he tried to initiate a shadow of ashram life, with early prayers, a walk up and down the verandah, letters taken by his two secretaries, Sushila Nayyar volunteered to massage the Mahatma and Kasturba every day, to help the two old people maintain their physical vitality. They were seventy-three years old.

Desai walked beside the man he loved as father and leader. He wanted with all his faithful heart to help the Mahatma in

every way he could, as always. He tried to speak cheerfully and hopefully; but whenever the prison mail was given to him he would look afraid, for no letters came from the Viceroy to bring consent to requests which Gandhi had made.

Word came that there was to be prison-inspection. Gandhi, however, had his usual walk with Desai, then asked Sushila for his daily massage, while Kasturba waited in Sarojini Naidu's room, next door. The famous poet was not well; her heart ailed, with anxiety over the daughter she had left ill, who did not even know that her mother was imprisoned. Desai had talked to Sarojini, heightening her anxiety; he said he was afraid that Gandhi was considering a fast, as protest against the Government. And if Bapu fasted, Desai knew it would mean the end. He would not survive the experience another time.

From Madam Naidu's room, Sushila – busy with her massaging – heard voices. Sarojini Naidu was arranging some flowers, in anticipation of the prison inspector's visit. There followed what seemed, surprisingly, the sound of a hearty laugh. The laughter stopped. Someone shouted Sushila's name. The girl stepped forward to meet what she thought would be the prison officials, but it was Kasturba who stumbled into the room, crying, 'Sushila, Sushila! Mahadev Desai has had a fit!'

He was on the floor, breathing heavily, his face twitching and his limbs moving convulsively. Kasturba had brought Gandhi meanwhile and he called to the young man at his feet, 'Mahadev! Mahadev!' Kasturba caught the young man's hand, and sobbed, 'Mahadev – Bapu is calling you!' Sushila expected no answer; Desai was dead. He had suffered heart failure from his fear that Gandhi would undertake another fast.

Prayers were said. A pyre was arranged on the prison grounds. Kasturba seemed unable to realize what had happened. Desai had been a Brahmin, and to her the sudden death of a Brahmin promised evil toward them all. As she watched the body burn on its pyre she whispered repeatedly, 'Desai . . . may God bless you wherever you are . . . May He keep you always happy, my boy.' But she would add, 'Why should God let Mahadev Desai go and not I? Is this God's justice?'

They returned at dusk to the prison, all silent. But Kasturba cried out, 'It is an evil omen.'

‘Yes,’ said her husband then, ‘to the Government.’ His wife would not be convinced it was not evil to them. Of Sushila she asked, why had Bapu permitted it?

‘Mahadev,’ answered the girl gravely, ‘laid down his life for the motherland. It is a noble death. Bapu has not launched the struggle, he is instead trying to negotiate with the Government. But they won’t let him do so, Ba.’ It was as if she explained to a child.

‘Yes,’ said Kasturba, unconvinced.

But word came, soon, that letters ‘could be sent to close relatives, on domestic matters.’ Letters nonetheless must not mention the whereabouts of a prisoner. Clothes and other necessities might be asked for, of near kinspeople.

Immediately, Sarojini Naidu wrote to enquire about her daughter. Clothing was brought to her by the authorities, from her husband’s home, and news of her daughter’s recovery cheered her too. Miraben asked to be allowed letters to friends in India, since her people were across the seas. She had no garment except the one she had worn when arrested. No reply at all came for her.

Sushila thought the English disciple of Gandhi ‘the most disadvantaged’ among them. Bapu himself had written at once to the Government that he must send a letter to Desai’s widow and son, to tell them about Mahadev’s death. ‘I have taken to ashram life many years ago, and to me there is no distinction between relatives and friends,’ he had underlined. He wanted to write to Patel, his close and old comrade, ‘on non-political matters.’ Unless he could write these letters, ‘permission to write is of no use to me,’ he said. He – like Miraben – received no reply.

For Sushila, the matter was difficult to decide, because her mother was not well. And besides, Sushila’s favourite kinswoman, the wife of her other brother, was expecting her first baby. Sarojini Naidu asked the young doctor: ‘Have you written to your mother yet?’ Kasturba asked repeatedly: ‘Haven’t you written to your mother?’ Sushila replied that she could not write, if the Mahatma thought it wrong to write.

Notice came now that letters to close friends might be sent if names and addresses were listed at the prison office. Kasturba

trotted to Sushila to demand: ' Won't you write to your mother now? '

There came somehow news that the sister-in-law had died in giving birth to her baby by Caesarian section. The dying girl had begged that her child be cared for, at least in its first months, by the young doctor. Mrs. Nayyar was gravely ill with shock and grief.

' Will you write a letter of sympathy to your mother now? ' asked Kasturba.

Sushila went to Gandhi. What did he think was right? He replied that he himself would not write letters under the conditions which were set. They were all in prison because of him, he knew, but if she ' had not the strength to follow ' him, she ' could withdraw and write home, like everyone else. '

The girl said ' I see no necessity to withdraw the letter I sent the Government. It would be distasteful to me. '

But for Kasturba the matter had taken on first importance by now. She flew to Gandhi to demand that Sushila write to her mother. He smiled: ' I have not prohibited her from doing so. ' He reminded her that Sushila of her own will had told the authorities she did not wish to write under the conditions set.

Kasturba seemed fairly to explode in her indignation: ' Did she know that tragedy was to befall? How could she say she would not write, at that time? '

To the girl she cried indignantly, with a sharpness not unfamiliar at Sevagram Ashram: ' Gandhiji is a Mahatma. Do you imagine you'll become a Mahatma by imitating him in this fashion? You ought to write a letter of sympathy to Mother! '

Nerves were frayed by close confinement, by the deadening monotony, and above all by the great sorrow of Desai's passing. The young doctor managed to say that she was not trying to be a Mahatma; but her heart was full, before the attack of her old friend. That evening, Gandhi asked her why she ' looked so glum. ' She burst out with what had happened. He listened thoughtfully.

Kasturba pursued her further, ' Bapuji, ' she insisted, ' is a Sadhu. He has broken wordly bonds. But the rest of us have not reached that state! ' It had become like a refrain for her to say: ' Write to your mother! '

‘ How can I go back on my word to the Government ? ’ asked Sushila.

Kasturba went to Gandhi himself finally. He must write to ask parole for Sushila, so that the girl could be with her mother and the orphaned baby. There must be a letter sent to Madam Nayyar, at once, by both Pyarelal and Sushila. And she won. He told the two young people that ‘ under the circumstances they should write at least once to their mother, for the sake of peace of mind.’

He himself asked the Government to parole Sushila. His request was refused.

The pall of sorrow, of deathly inactivity, deepened over them all.

But suddenly Kasturba thought of a plan for continuous notes to Madam Nayyar. She asked Sushila to take dictation for letters to Devadas. He lived not far from Madam Nayyar. To Devadas, Kasturba sent news of Sushila and her brother; the pages she posted were in turn given to Madam Nayyar. She had solved the issue of writing letters, she said with satisfaction.

Then, however, she became passive and indifferent, as before, with nothing to fight for and nothing to do.

Even Sarojini Naidu, who had always met danger blithely, who had regally defied death, succumbed to the weight of inaction. She was sixty-three. In the past twenty years she had been in prison repeatedly. But now she – who had been called ‘ the Indian Judith ’ – seemed to lose strength, not merely physically, but in the spirit. How many years – if not to death itself – would they remain in their living tomb ?

The sole break in its appalling monotony was a weekly visit, every Saturday, to the place where Desai had been cremated; the women took flowers there in his memory every seven days. But after a time, Kasturba missed a Saturday now and again. Sushila would come back from the pilgrimage with the other women, to find the old woman sitting immobile at her little spinning wheel. That too she was using less often.

Strangely enough, Miraben seemed to undergo their ordeal best. She made a sort of court in the prison yard and began to play tennis and badminton there – games remembered from her girlhood in Dorking, the English village where she had been brought up. She did not intrude on Gandhi, did not ask his time

nor thought. Often, Sushila sighted Kasturba watching the Englishwoman from a verandah chair; surprisingly, the small woman seemed to understand the games. If anyone tried to cheat 'or to be too clever' she would call down the offender promptly.

Miraben also began playing a game of cards - 'karrom' - with two of the prison doctors. She almost always won because she was most proficient. Kasturba would watch as this game was played; if Miraben lost she would become strangely upset. Presently, Miraben drew her into the game, as partner. Sushila would note how earnestly the old woman prepared herself for the game during the day hours; all afternoon she would practise its play. But when she lost, it so disturbed her that she could not sleep that night. Miraben arranged that she must always win - in the final round. Kasturba herself found ultimate importance in having a queen; if she were dealt a queen she believed the game became a drama.

So much did she lose herself in 'karrom' that she appeared for a time to forget she was afraid of the 'evil' due to come because of the death of Desai, a Brahmin. She seemed even not to notice that she was not well at all. One day she declared that she would begin fasting on Elkadash, the eleventh day. But soon she fasted also on Mondays if there were a full moon. Because she could not read a calendar, Gandhi had Sushila make one for her, and he himself marked 'full-moon days' in red pencil, and 'no-moon days' in blue. Even so, he had to tell her when fast-days came.

One of her granddaughters was permitted at last to visit the prison. There were walks, reminiscences, gossip about ashram people, news of Manilal, of Ramdas, of Devadas; there was even a word about poor Harilal, the derelict son. Kasturba's face began to look brighter.

Yet one day Sushila heard her old friend ask the convict cook - a Brahmin - a question: 'Maharaj - you are a Brahmin. Tell me, when shall we get home?'

Sarojini Naidu had told the press of the world more than once: 'I look forward to the day when the finest Untouchable in India will rule the land.' But for Kasturba Gandhi, although she was gentle towards Harijans in prison, caste remained an unalterable distinction, and Brahmins at the head. She had

given the cook respect since her arrival, offering him small gifts of fruit, milk and such things, and saying to her own friends extenuatingly: 'After all . . . he is a Brahmin boy.'

The poor fellow she addressed answered that he 'would look it up in the books' and 'tell the lady' when their prison stay was to end. But nothing seemed to be discovered by him.

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SAROJINI NAIDU, MIRABEN, SUSHILA AND KASTURBA

THE PRISON did not permit much opportunity for solitary meditation. It was Miraben who suggested one day: 'Bapu needs quiet - let us make him a hut, under the mango tree in the garden.'

Kasturba, who had never let it be seen that she had the slightest jealousy toward any other woman, snapped: 'Where is the need for a hut? Bapu can experience quiet in any place!'

Sushila had been asked by Gandhi himself to write a little biography, during the lifeless prison days, of Kasturba. The girl put down this small incident, but with love toward both of the older women. The tiny rift between Miraben and Kasturba was soon healed. But there was no hut built. Gandhi, when he felt need to be apart from the rest, walked alone, then sat alone - in silence - thinking his thoughts. His withdrawals deepened the feeling of unhappiness and fear in the others. Sarojini Naidu was constantly unwell, suffering from her chronic illness less than from the deadening lassitude imposed on them all through lack of any newspaper, lack of any news of the living people in their whole land. Even Miraben did not hide her heavy concern as months passed, and Gandhi spent more and more time apart from his little group.

One day Kasturba burst out to Sushila: 'Even God seems against us at present! Why else should He have carried away Mahadev Desai?'

Gandhi happened to come in at the moment. He said,

‘Desai’s death is one of the noblest sacrifices on the altar of freedom. It is bound to bring the day of deliverance for India nearer.’ His wife listened, silently.

But a few days later, Kasturba flung at him. ‘Did I not tell you not to pick a quarrel with the mighty Government? How long can the people bear it? What will be the result of all this?’

He asked, ‘What do you want me to do? Write to the Government and ask their forgiveness?’

‘Why ask for anyone’s forgiveness?’ she retorted angrily, like a child.

Sushila’s heart filled, as the old woman added, ‘Delicate young girls are lying in gaols and do you ask forgiveness? Here is nothing to do now but put up with the result of your doings! Mahadev Desai is gone – next is my turn!’

Gandhi listened in silence. But a few days later she asked him: ‘Why do you want the British to quit India? Our country’s so vast! We can all live here – let them stay if they like! But tell them to stay, as brothers –’

‘What else have I done?’ he asked. ‘I want them to quit, as rulers. Once they have ceased to be our rulers – we have no quarrel with them.’ He brought the matter to the level of her own thinking, at last. She nodded as she said: ‘Yes . . . we cannot have them as rulers . . . but they can stay as brothers if they wish.’

Next morning, as Sushila massaged her, she told the girl: ‘Bapu has told the British they can stay in India as our brothers, but they want to stay as rulers.’

Sarojini Naidu spoke to Sushila Nayyar one morning. Pyarelal already had asked the young physician the question which the poet put to her. ‘How many days do you think Bapu can stand it – in his present state of health?’ *How many days of fasting*, was what the question meant. For Pyarelal had taken dictation of a letter to the Viceroy, saying that a fast would be undertaken by Gandhi, in protest against the complete isolation from his people. The Mahatma’s silent hours alone had been occupied with making a decision in regard to sending such a letter, and before that in regard to beginning another fast. The letter was now written, and waiting to be mailed.

Sushila answered Madam Naidu as she had her own brother: ‘During the last fast, in Rajkot, his condition became serious on

the fifth day. I judge he could not take the punishment of a long fast now.'

'He must not undertake one,' said Sarojini Naidu decisively. 'He cannot survive it, at his age and in his weak state of health.' Then she added what was in the minds of the others also: 'The time for the supreme sacrifice has not yet come.'

Kasturba hurried into her husband's room one morning. She knew nothing of the letter he had dictated. But she cried out, 'Write to the Viceroy, by all means! But, please, don't say anything about going on a fast!'

Instinctively, she had guessed what he was saying in his letter.

The others asked themselves: *How could she endure a fast if he undertook it?*

Sarojini Naidu comforted the small old woman: 'Don't worry, Ba. Bapu's said he won't fast unless there's a clear call from God to do so. God will never tell him to go on a fast.'

Kasturba flung back: 'I know that! But what if Bapu makes up his mind that God wants him to do so?' They who were listening did not answer. Her childlike logic spoke what was in their own minds. They watched her as she began a prayer-programme. When Gandhi would walk away for a half-hour's silent meditation, Kasturba went to the potted tulasi plant on the prison verandah; falling on her knees before it she would pray that her husband would not begin a fast.

Only one person dared speak to the Mahatma himself. Sarojini Naidu went to him directly to say: 'Bapu, your fasting would kill Ba.'

He only laughed and answered, 'I know her better than others. You've no idea how brave she can be. None of you really know her. I've lived with her for sixty-two years – and I tell you, she would stand it better than any of you.' He reminded Sarojini Naidu of the day she herself had come to him – brought from her prison to watch over him, dying in his own prison – when he fasted because of the Harijans. Kasturba had come also, at the time they thought him dying. He had told her to bring his possessions to be distributed among the attendants. And she had distributed them, herself. '*And her eyes were dry,*' smiled Gandhi to the woman sitting troubled beside him now.

He had, he added, already sent a letter to the Viceroy, saying

he would enter upon a fast on 10 February. It would continue until 2 March.

There was no changing him, as Madam Naidu knew.

10 February 1943 they all joined him in prayer at dawn, had breakfast with him; prayer followed, and then his fast began. He was to live solely on unsalted water, without even fruit-juice added; only 'in the extremity of death' would he, perhaps, take some fruit juice, a drop at a time, to enable him to continue his fast to its end. Kasturba entered a fast also, at once; she became his nurse, as usual, during his own ordeal.

Sushila, seeing that the old woman could not survive on the single meal of a glass of milk and a glass of fruit juice she had set herself, persuaded her that – if she hoped to look after the Mahatma – she must take two meals daily.

Gandhi began to fail on the third day; the young doctor saw that his blood was thickening and his kidneys weakening. He was an old man of seventy-four. On the twelfth day, it was clear that his life was 'in the balance.' Kasturba did not move from him day and night, but now Sushila also sat beside him the day through. Whether he would survive until evening was in God's hands alone.

A touch on Sushila's hand caused her to look up. Miraben had come in. Kasturba had left the room. Miraben drew the girl toward the open door of the verandah. They saw Kasturba kneeling before the sacred tulasi plant, her hands palm to palm, and on her lifted face a look of supplication which brought tears to the eyes of the two watching her. When they slipped away she did not know they had come and gone.

Gandhi refused even a drop of orange juice in his half tumbler of water. He vomited the water and fell back fainting. Sushila felt his pulse; the wrist was cold, clammy. Remembering the tiny woman in prayer, the young doctor trembled, unconsciously. She was here alone with the Mahatma. Sarojini Naidu was ill. Miraben had gone to her own room. Kasturba was lost in prayer. Gandhi seemed to be unconscious. By some inward command, the girl found courage to speak to him: 'Bapuji? Don't you think it's time you made use of the fruit juice? To make the water more drinkable?' He lay immobile, his lips dry.

Minutes passed and he seemed as one dead. Then she imagined that his head made an almost imperceptible motion

. . . of assent. She swiftly put a few drops of lime-juice into the water and gave it to him, drop by drop. His eyes opened. The drink renewed life in him. There was a sound at the door, and turning, the girl saw Kasturba. It was, thought Sushila, as if God had told her to come to see that her prayers were answered. The old woman sat down beside her husband and took over responsibility again for his care.

He had said when he began the fast that he did not wish to die; he wanted to live and complete it to its end. Presently he was able to sit up on his cot and to speak a few words now and then.

News of the Mahatma's fast seemed to seep out of the prison to the people, and it roared like thunder over all the land, over the whole world. Lord Linlithgow had seemed, to Indian National Congress, a man drunk with power. But it was impossible to do what he had planned, keep Gandhi as one dead to his people. It was found to be impossible, indeed, to keep the masses from him, now that they learned he was laying down his life, in the *Satyagraha* war for their freedom. The Government was obliged to throw open the gates of his prison palace, and his countrymen surged toward it, by thousands, to see him, to know he was alive. He could not speak to them; his fast was not broken. But they could see him, emaciated, yet not yielding to their rulers. They looked at him and filed past without a word, their faces speaking for them. He quickly became exhausted, but he did not admit it. Everyone who came to him was received, before leaving, by his wife. She was cheerful, happy, though she had never had a moment's rest. Among those who came were her grandchildren, too.

Sushila smiled, for she knew that though Kasturba believed she 'had adopted the whole world as her family' – in obedience to her husband – she 'still loved as nearest and dearest' her own kinspeople.

The authorities decided to halt the flood of visitors to their leader. Only close kin could visit the prisoner now. Gandhi said then that 'if all cannot come, my sons cannot come.' They were therefore not to be present when he broke his fast. Only the prison group, and six doctors, were with him on 2 March, 1943. But there came in Sarojini Naidu, magnificent in a deep mauve silk sari, as if she were hostess at a great durbar in Bombay.

Miraben in her rough khadi gown led the singing of a hymn she had taught the ashram members long ago: 'Lead, Kindly Light.' Gandhi loved this Christian hymn. Then a glass of fruit juice in water was given Gandhi by his wife; he required a half hour to sip the six ounces of liquid. Not a word was said by anyone.

Sarojini Naidu rustled about, regally, and served the six prison doctors fruit juice now. There was no talk, no laughter. She asked if the doctors would wish to have a second glass of fruit juice. The men silently received this from her hands. The silence continued throughout. Gandhi lay worn, haggard, and sorrowful, on his cot. It was a bleak ceremony, despite Madam Naidu's gallant show of pride.

Three days later, even permission to have relatives visit the prisoners was withdrawn. Sarojini Naidu no longer had the comfort of seeing her daughters, her husband. Sushila and Pyarelal refused to be downcast. But Kasturba was crushed by the order. Wavell, the new Viceroy to take over in October, believed that the solution for India's war of *Satyagraha* lay in partition, dividing Hindu and Moslem, and destroying Gandhi's power thereby. Jinnah was quoted in the press as stating that his Moslem League would refuse to become embroiled in Gandhi's conflict with the Empire.

The fast which had ended seemed to accomplish nothing with the Government.

Until now, Gandhi had insisted that the authorities 'must release political prisoners in less than six months, or free them because India would be ruined, for keeping them gaoled would be unnecessary.' Now, he knew they might remain as long as seven years and even more.

Miraben, who in the past had clung to Gandhi whenever he fasted, or became ill, or went away, found strength to face whatever befell, now that she was with him in the same prison. She was to write, a few years later, out of her memories as his disciple:

Of all the incidents in Bapu's . . . career, to me the richest and profoundest is the ever-recurring incident of his daily life . . .

Not that he gets up at 3.30, has prayers twice daily, eats unspiced food, etc. . . . It is the *way* he does every-

thing. Whenever I am with Bapu I love to sit near him in silence for a while each day. Not when he is meeting people and carrying on discussions, but when he is alone. I know nothing more exquisitely gentle than the touch of Bapu's hand and I am never tired of watching him handling his writing work. Nothing is ruffled or damaged by his hands and nothing is wasted.

With utmost tenderness, she told the quaint, sometimes absurd little quirks of his character – how he cut off every empty scrap of paper from letters received, to be used by himself for notes and even letters; how he saved bits of pencil, to be used as tiniest stubs; how he carried his own ink bottle wherever he went. Nothing must be wasted, he believed, which could be used to help finance khadi.

Gandhi (then) turns and lies down on his *gaddhi* to rest, removes his glasses, and in a minute is asleep and breathing as peacefully as a little child.

I take up a hankie, and sitting near his head, keep off the flies.

There is only one real Gandhi ashram in the whole world, and that is the few square feet containing Bapu's *gaddhi* and little writing desk.

Gandhi loved the final lines of the hymn she had taught his ashramites:

And in the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.

For her, his was the 'angel face' to love. She had loved it since she came to serve him, twenty years before. Wherever he was, she was content.

33

KASTURBA

WHEN THE GOVERNMENT refused to state a time for their terms to end, Sarojini Naidu's buoyancy and pride both seemed to flag. Her famed wit deserted her. She still teased the Mahatma at times, asked him why he did not play tennis and badminton with Miraben. But she missed her home, its beauty, its gracious luxury. She missed the impetus for writing, which quiet and serenity gave her. They had spent a year and a half in the deadly monotony of prison and there seemed no end, ahead.

Gandhi himself had established a time-clock of activity; he tried to work out a daily routine for the others, to keep them so occupied that gloom would not occupy them. Even for Kasturba a programme was arranged – breakfast, prayer, massage by Sushila, and then lessons given by Gandhi, lessons in reading and geography and the *Gita*. At seventy-four, she was back where she had begun as a child bride of thirteen, the pupil of Mohandas.

Sarojini Naidu laughed to see how Gandhi – after midday meals – ‘took an orange and on it tried to teach longitude, latitude, and the equator.’ But surprisingly, Kasturba tried to learn what he taught her. Pyarelal was teaching the Gandhi small granddaughter (who, as an unusual favour, was permitted to visit the old woman when she became sick) the same subjects which Gandhi taught Kasturba herself. One day Sushila heard her old friend correct Pyarelal, pointing out that he had ‘mixed up Hindustani terms because of not knowing the language.’

Nonetheless, in geography, when asked by Gandhi the names of Punjabi rivers, she was unable to remember them, though she had learned them by heart the day before. ‘Sushila,’ she begged, ‘write them on a slip of paper for me?’ All day, even while spinning, she studied the list of Punjabi rivers; but next

day she failed again to remember them. 'Due to my ill health,' she declared, 'my brain has lost the capacity to memorize.'

She did learn to read to the Fifth Grade in her Gujarati *Reader*, but when her husband marked passages in which she made mistakes while reading aloud to him, she abandoned the lessons. She began studying the *Gita* then. Pyarelal translated sections for her into Gujarati, at Gandhi's request.

Sarojini Naidu would look at the two old people and laugh lovingly at their 'honeymooning.' It pleased her to watch them at the lessons – these friends of hers for thirty years.

But after a month or so Kasturba said she was 'too old to study.' She wanted only to 'send letters' to her children. She still wrote each letter of the alphabet separately and in zigzag lines; it was impossible to decipher what she put down. She said that if she 'had a notebook like the others,' she could do better. Gandhi answered: 'You shall have one when you show improvement.' That wounded her to the heart; though he tried to apologize, she told Sushila 'it is too late.'

Sarojini Naidu, the understanding friend, sent for a notebook. The old woman would not accept it when Sushila brought it to her. Sarojini herself then tried to coax her to use it, and without success. When Gandhi came to add his pleas, Kasturba hid the notebook away among his papers, refusing to say where it was. 'What do I need a notebook for?' she retorted.

It was plain that her health was failing rapidly. In the second December of their prison stay, a sort of breathlessness began to trouble her. She would sit on the prison verandah watching her husband walking with Manu, their granddaughter. Sushila usually was on the other side. She could not hear their talk, in which Manu always importuned her grandfather for 'a story.' The tales he told had, Sushila remarked, 'always a moral.' But once when she asked why he did not tell stories from his own life, he told incidents from his youth, and even from the early years of marriage to Kasturba. He remembered being taken, as little more than a baby, to play with Kasturba Nakanji in her father's garden. He continued day by day, returning to the past – with his wife as young bride. He told how she had 'tried to overcome tenets' because he demanded it.

In her notes for Kasturba's biography, Sushila Nayyar put down what he said:

I must say that the ladies in the family helped me in this! They would tell her, ' We must stick to our orthodox views and not allow Untouchables into our houses nor drink water touched by a Moslem, but these things are not for you . . . For you, the higher ideal is to follow your husband. Whatever you do – in following him – for that no sin attaches to you. The result cannot be anything but good! '

He was anxious for Sushila to begin the actual writing of Kasturba's life. It was as if he opened his mind to reveal treasures kept in it over the sixty years and more that had passed.

By the end of December 1943, Kasturba's breathing had become so difficult that she could not sleep; a small wooden table was improvised and placed across her legs. She would put her arms on it and rest her head on the folded arms. It was infinitely moving to the rest to see her sleeping so. Miraben suggested that they bring the card games into Kasturba's room. Because her illness lost the fourth at games, Miraben played one turn for herself and a second for Kasturba. This cost her the game, very often, though she was the star player; her losing worried Kasturba, who could not bear that her ' partner ' was defeated. Someone else, she insisted, must act as Miraben's partner, so that she would win as always.

It was plain that she had become very ill by now.

It was confinement which was destroying her, Sushila knew. Even the Government realized this finally. Relatives were permitted to visit her weekly. Kanu, her grandson, was allowed to join the prison group. Gandhi was barred from being present, but a doctor was sent to his wife. What she wanted, however, was a native doctor; Gandhi wrote repeatedly, until permission was granted to have an Aryurvedic physician come. But the prayers and herbs did not make her well.

Sarojini Naidu, too, was very ill. Her illness was diagnosed as malaria, which became critical. It seemed that she was to die in prison. The Government, in order to prevent her becoming a martyr, as Desai had been, hurriedly provided medical care for her. But she was a woman of sixty-four, shattered physically. She showed no response under the treatment by physician doctors. Reluctantly, orders were given to send her home.

Miraben and Sushila remained to look after Kasturba, as best they could.

In Miraben's room was an image of Krishna. One day Gandhi sighted his wife's wheel chair before the image; she was praying to the god. She asked her husband what he was doing here, and added as shyly as if she were a girl: 'Go - have your walk.'

She had come to pray that her eldest son, Harilal, would come to see her.

When Gandhi learned this, he wrote until he persuaded the Government to arrange it. 17 February the son who had hated him since boyhood came. But there was to be no more than one visit, the prison heads declared. Kasturba cried, 'Why shouldn't a poor son see his mother, as freely as a rich one?' Did not her son Devadas, who was rich, have permission to come every day now? Gandhi promised to ask permission for daily visits by Harilal. But when permission was granted, nobody could find Harilal. Devadas and Ramdas promised they would not stop looking until they could bring him to their mother.

19 February she became so ill that Devadas begged her to be treated by a magic new drug, penicillin. Gandhi, himself still very ill from his fast, was breaking under the strain of his wife's progressive sickness and was living on a restricted liquid diet. But he found strength to take a stand. Kasturba had been living through torture so many months; it was best not to add more by strange drugs.

The following day Harilal appeared before his mother, explaining that he would have come earlier, but 'had overslept.' He was drunk. He returned next day tipsy again. Kasturba beat her forehead with her hands, and wept aloud for her son. When Devadas appeared she sobbed, 'Bapuji is a saint! He has to think of the whole world... and you know about Harilal. So, the care of the family falls to your lot.' Her youngest son pledged himself to look after the children of his eldest brother.

Devadas begged for her release from prison. The answer given was that if she were freed, Gandhi's freedom also would be demanded. She herself said to Gandhi: 'Do not sorrow after my death.' He put her head on his knees and comforted her, as if she were a little child. Her head fell back against him and he

asked, 'What is the matter, what do you feel?' Like a child she answered, 'I do not know.'

She lay very quietly with her head against his breast. Sushila Nayyar knew that Kasturba was freed at last. As she had often said, she would remain there forever, with Desai. The hour was half-past seven, on 22 February, 1944.

Miraben took responsibility for the necessary rites. She had Kasturba's bed set north and south, after Hindu custom for the dead. The grandchildren permitted in prison — Manu, Kanu, Rima — swept clean their grandmother's room. Then Miraben asked Sushila to help her bathe the small body, wash and comb the grey thin hair. She wrapped Kasturba in a sari of khadi. Someone twined homespun yarn about the almost transparent wrists, as bangles; a necklace of fine tulasi beads was placed about the dead woman's throat. Miraben marked a corner of the prison grounds with whitewash near where Desai had been taken — a small oblong space. Here would be brought the body that had been so quick and vivid in life.

It was Miraben also who arranged flowers in Kasturba's hair and about her head. She saw to it that a bright blanket of flowers was placed over the tiny figure. Now all was ready for the funeral pyre. It was a woman from a far land and a strange people — the people whom Gandhi fought for his people's freedom — that made his wife ready for the last rites.

The prison superintendent offered a whole sandalwood tree, for the pyre. Gandhi promised not to attend the rites, if his sons and some friends could come; this was refused. But then permission was given for them to come.

Gandhi himself said the prayers from Hindu, Parsee, Moslem and Christian scriptures. Devadas lighted his mother's pyre. About one hundred and fifty persons were present, and there were many flowers. It took the small body so long a time to burn that Gandhi did not leave until evening, though the rites began in the early morning. 'How can I leave her like this, after sixty-two years in companionship?' he asked. He tried to force a smile: 'I am sure she won't forgive me for that.' Manilal, the second son, was not there; he had last seen his mother when he visited India in 1939, five years ago. Only Ramdas and Devadas were with their father.

His sons gathered their mother's ashes at last, to be mingled

with the waters of holy rivers. It was Miraben who walked beside Gandhi, back to prison. She saw tears in his eyes, the first tears she had ever seen him shed. With tears on his cheeks, he managed to say: 'Though for her sake, I've welcomed death . . . as bringing freedom from a living agony . . . I feel the loss more than I thought I would.' He added, 'We were a couple outside the ordinary. Ours was a life of contentment and happiness and progress . . .'

In the prison they who remained gathered about him. He sat down on his cot, and after a moment said: 'I cannot imagine life without Ba.' He was long silent, before he spoke again: 'I had always wanted her to go, in my hands. So that I would not have to worry as to what would become of her, when I was no more. But she was an indivisible part of me. Her passing has left a vacuum which never will be filled.' He asked Sushila, had he been wrong to refuse the use of penicillin? – the use of which would have 'meant bankruptcy of faith on my part.' Devadas, who heard the question later, comforted him by saying nothing would have changed what happened.

He asked Sushila to complete the little book on Kasturba. He wrote a brief preface to it, in Gujarati, the tongue which he and his wife knew in their childhood and in their life together through all the years of marriage:

It seems to me that the root cause which attracted the people to Kasturba was her ability to lose herself in me . . . I never insisted on this self-abnegation; she developed this quality on her own . . . At first I did not even know that she had it in her. According to my earlier experience, she was very obstinate. In spite of all my pressure, she would do as she wished. But as my public life expanded, my wife bloomed forth and deliberately lost herself in me. As time passed, I and my service of the people became one; she slowly merged herself in my activities . . .

What developed the self abnegation in her to the highest level was our Brahmacharaya. The latter turned out to be more natural for her than for me. I made a resolve . . . and she accepted it as her own . . . Thenceforward, we became true friends . . . Ba had no other interest in staying with me except to help me in

my work. She could not live away from me . . . As woman and as wife, she considered it her duty to lose herself in me ever after. She did not cease looking after me, till her last breath.

But her death broke his own health. Early in May, he became dangerously ill with malaria. The Government released him, as it had before, so that he would not die a prisoner, a deathless martyr. Sushila and her brother, with Miraben, were taken to the waiting automobile sent by the authorities. Gandhi himself lingered, picking up odds and ends — mementoes of Kasturba, her medicine bottle, a pencil, a bit of her clothing. Sushila was to look after him, until he became well again. Miraben was to go to the ashram to see what could be done there.

A month after his release, Sarojini Naidu was presiding over a meeting of the 'Committee to Save Children.' Plans were made to establish a shelter for four hundred children in Bengal. Madam Naidu was forbidden to make an address, but as soon as she could rise from her sickbed she had returned to work in Gandhi's cause again. At another meeting to which she went, as presiding officer, plans were made to raise funds for a memorial to Kasturba Gandhi, a memorial which would be expressed in work for women and children of India and which would be established in her name. Dhan Chandra published a slim book telling of Kasturba's life, its youth and its dedicated old age.

Gandhi seemed unable to return to health. He was a crumpled, defeated old man at last, and it was only through his friends that his lifework still went on. Whether he lived was in the hands of Sushila Nayyar.

34

VIJAYA LAKSHMI PANDIT

IT SEEMED THAT the small man freed 'solely on medical grounds' was to be silenced, in the brief space of life left him. From the hospital to which Gandhi had been taken, Sushila issued bulletins, repeating daily: 'His condition remains the

same.' But his disciples, as soon as they were given liberty, spoke for him, by the many thousands – women and men alike.

Sarojini Naidu cried out, in characteristic glowing words, before an audience composed of faculty and students at the University of Calcutta:

What part are we to play, in building up a new world after the war? Are we simply to listen to terms dictated by others, or shall we state that *we* must have a voice in framing the new charter of liberty?

That there would be a charter of liberty won, she had never doubted. 'India's Joan of Arc,' they called her, at sixty-five, who had been 'India's Nightingale' before.

Rajkumari Amrit Kaur came back to her home in Simla, the lithe slenderness of her figure thinned almost to emaciation. Her fine mouth showed lines of irony, as if amusement at the humiliations imposed on Gandhi disciples. When in 1936 she had first joined Sevagram Ashram, an account of her life stated that she was the daughter of Maharajah Harmon Singh and told the story of his Christianity and his immense wealth, as well as his opposition to his daughter's becoming one of the eleven wives in the harem of Punjab's leading Sikh. Not even the brashest reporter, however, found the temerity to ask the princess if the story were true; yet few articles failed to stress the wonder of correspondents who heard from her own lips that she was wholly content, as secretary who knelt before Gandhi to take his daily dictation, and who, when Miraben was absent, served the Mahatma as personal attendant.

At Simla, Amrit Kaur took time only to recover her health, before beginning again the teaching of villagers in sanitation and health, which had been her interest even before formally entering Sevagram Ashram. But, like Sarojini Naidu and many others, she also took up the responsibility of keeping India aware of need to continue Gandhi's 'Quit India' programme, with regard to Britain.

Miraben – who at Poona Prison had never wavered in gallantry and upon whose quietude all the rest had depended – found it would be impossible to resume her own work for some time. Long confinement, and the tragedy of Desai's death first, and later Kasturba's, with Gandhi's own seemingly incurable collapse at the end, brought on a heart condition necessitating

rest and medical treatment. It was not possible now for her to help nurse the Mahatma himself. But even so, she tried to find a piece of land for an ashram of her own.

But he – even while bulletins told that he remained gravely ill – already had begun, before a month was ended, to send letters to co-workers over all India, writing, as was his habit, on corners of newspapers, scraps of letter paper, postcards, to save cost of stationery. For him the problem to face was not only continuance of demand for his country's statehood, but winning Ali Jinnah over from insistence on division of the nation into two parts, one Hindu, one Moslem.

Gandhi knew that the country must never be cut in two, for war would follow between Hindu and Moslem. To Miraben he sent a series of notes, telling her in them:

Thanks for your letters. Do not worry, I am very well. Devadas says he saw you and that your body has become dilapidated. I fear I have to take the blame for that, in part if not in whole. Beware of overwork. Do come to Simla, when I am there. I go any day now. Love, Bapu.

In Simla, she could be with Amrit Kaur. It was necessary to see Amrit, to work out a plan for meeting with Jinnah, who had steadily resisted arranging conferences for discussion. Articles in England and America often were concerned with India; but they did not appear to be aware of the story which Gandhi knew it was vital for them to know.

Readers of Sunday papers in the United States learned that the Aga Khan had received on his birthday a gift of \$2,500,000 in diamonds from his followers – a tall pile of diamonds equal in weight to his own. The Nizam of Hyderabad, preparing for a journey, had a train of coaches made, to provide full air conditioning and complete *zenana* for his one hundred and fifty wives. The rajah of Baroda married a dancing girl, lost her to kidnappers and saw murder committed in regaining her.

The Nizam of Hyderabad owned five million acres. A nabob might have three hundred rooms in his home; rich potentates would have such palaces in several cities of their domain. A society woman, living in strict purdah, might entertain friends at an afternoon tea for which would be spent a sum which could

provide food, housing and clothing for a hundred common peasants for a full year.

In the radiantly lovely city of Bombay, the poor were not yet recovered from the famine of 1943. Residents of fabulous Malabar Hill drove through the streets – in limousines or in carriages drawn by horses caparisoned with brocades embroidered in precious stones. They did not even take note of people looking into the windows of restaurants where obsequious waiters were serving exotic fruits and champagne brought from far lands. At one Bombay wedding the families of bride and groom completely took over both of the city's most fashionable hotels for fourteen days, with hundreds of guests fed and housed and entertained until festivities ended.

On the pavements and in the gutters of the city lay the bodies of dead children and old men, their abdomens bloated with starvation. To Gandhi, it was these people, the dispossessed, the disregarded and rejected, who were India.

He knew from his own experience – as who among India's cultivated people did not? – that there were theatres in which no Indian could buy seats, tennis courts open only to whites, restaurants where none but English people would be fed. But he knew also the poor of his country were oppressed and forgotten by their own higher castes. It was their story which, for him, was the story that must be righted when India was free. It was for them that he sought to keep India from being severed in half, with hatred and enmity resulting.

The story must be told to people of the Western nations, he knew. Then only could they understand what he hoped to accomplish for his own people. The task of telling this story was assigned, in 1944, to Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit.

She came out of prison, but her husband did not. He died in Lucknow Gaol, the third martyr the Nehru family had given to the cause. With Pandit, she had had an idyll of happy marriage for twenty-three years, and now he was lost to her. Yet, despite her widowhood, and though she had her three daughters to care for, she left for America.

She was first to attend the Pacific Council meeting and speak at its sessions, and then tour the country, giving a series of lectures on India as she knew it – and as Gandhi and his followers hoped it would be after statehood came. Her lectures

were to explain also the difficulties arising from Jinnah's demands.

To the average American, Gandhi was oftenest a caricature, with loincloth about the middle of a skinny, wizened body, large bald head made droller by big protruding ears and the scraggly moustache emphasizing a wide toothless grin under a huge nose straddled by big spectacles. To many more thoughtful people, who took him seriously, he was still no more than a charlatan, a traitor in the struggle waged by Britain for survival.

Yet in 1942, when he was sent to Poona Prison, old General Smuts – his former adversary in South Africa – wrote to Churchill:

It is nonsense to talk of Gandhi as a Fifth Columnist.

He is one of the great ones of the world, and the last to be in such a category.

Gandhi's friends and co-workers knew that he bore no resentment, not a trace of hatred, toward either Churchill or the British Government. He wanted only to have his people free. This, Madam Pandit began to present late in 1944 to American audiences.

The writer saw her at one lecture – a slight figure in snowy silken sari over a white gown, her arms bare to the shoulders in Indian fashion. Her hair, which had turned white in prison, was cut short but a natural wave showed in it. She had been called 'Beauty' as a child, and in young womanhood was acknowledged as one of her country's loveliest women. Maturity had not marred the lines of her face or figure. Her unusual administrative gifts had been revealed in her work as member of the Education Council, and later as Minister of Local Self-Government and Health for the United Provinces. She spoke with great skill. When, twenty years earlier, Sarojini Naidu met audiences in New York, her listeners had been awed, even subdued, by her eloquence, brilliance, her barbed and searching wit. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit was more winsome, infinitely feminine in her vivid ardour; yet she presented, as an able executive would, the solid facts and statistics needed to form a foundation on which to build her appeal.

She was not completely satisfied with her tour. Returning home in February, she said that she had found what to her appeared 'a conspiracy on the part of Britain and the United

States, to keep the situation in India from the people of the United States.' She meant to return for another series of lectures and almost at once went back. One day while in New York she attended – unofficially of course – a meeting being held to form a charter for 'The United Nations.' A member of the British delegation was speaking on the question of treatment of South African Indians. He said, 'Gandhi's methods are fifty years behind the times.' Instantly the small woman in her white sari rose to her feet, dark eyes blazing. She gave the picture as Gandhi knew it, in 1894, as Madam Naidu saw it in 1926, as Nehru found it only lately. When Madam Pandit sat down, the whole assemblage rose as one man, voting a unanimous protest against conditions met by her countrymen in South Africa.

Next day a newspaper said 'Singlehanded, Madam Pandit won the case for her people in South Africa.' Her voice was heard around the globe. She became a world figure, that day.

But – in London – Churchill spoke of India itself, thundering ominously: 'If we lose India, we shall go down, out, or under. India is our bread and butter, that is all.'

George the Sixth – in many respects not unlike his great-grandfather, the gentle, dedicated Prince Albert, gave his heart and thought to the crisis faced by his realm. In his honours list for the coming year were to be included a number of rich rajahs, whose wealth was necessary to help pay the costs of fighting an enemy who threatened total defeat. However, peace was declared in 1945 quite suddenly. The war Premier, who had refused to admit the very possibility of defeat, was ousted; a Labour Government replaced Churchill with the Socialist Clement Attlee. The new Premier, believing that imprisoning Gandhi-ites now was a costly luxury, and fighting Ali Jinnah in armed conflict an impossibility, announced that 'full independence' would be granted India as soon as her leaders agreed among themselves. Churchill tolled out phrases, of which he alone was past master, such as: 'In handing over the government of India, to these so called political classes, we are handing it over to men of straw, of whom, in a few months, no trace will remain.'

He was overruled: by February 1947 the Labour Government announced that statehood was to be conferred before June 1948. To the world, it appeared that Gandhi's lifelong struggle –

waged by his curious method of *Satyagraha* – had won the victory he sought so long.

To his countrymen however, the news brought terror immediately. A migration instantly began, of Moslems who fled toward Mohammedan cities and of Hindus who tried to escape from Moslem territory. Gandhi's fears were realized. He began a tour of the provinces, to reassure the people, Sikh, Moslem, Hindu alike, to promise them that he would not cease to work for a united land, when statehood came.

To Madam Pandit fell the task of making clear to the United States that the issue in her country now was the difference in concepts between Jinnah and Gandhi. The Moslem lawyer insisted on two nations, one Hindu, one Moslem; Gandhi on his part felt that India must be saved from partition, at any cost. Foreign reporters found him in the Harijan section of Delhi, about which he was speaking to the peasants. He had determined to live only with the Untouchables whenever in a large city. To the press he pointed out that the 'end of alien rule' would put all men – Europeans and Indians both – 'on an equal basis, with special privilege to none.' That he believed basic, in the new era beginning. But, he added, the end of alien rule must not be the beginning of a divided India. He meant to resist that with all his strength.

In the stories cabled to their editors, some reporters had a brief paragraph: .

'With Gandhi was the former Madeleine Slade, daughter of a British admiral, who in 1925 attracted wide attention by forsaking her people, and becoming a Gandhi disciple.'

To the press, she said only: ' My heart is in India, and always will be.' There were those who read with disbelief that an Englishwoman should declare her loyalty was to Gandhi's people – not her own.

She was busy helping Gandhi in work with refugees, who formed makeshift camps in their flight to or from cities where their own faith was predominant. Gandhi himself spent the days – week after week – visiting villages, speaking to the frightened people, urging them to have no fear, assuring them all would be well when independence came, if they but bore love to one

another and also to those of other faiths. When he spoke, the people grew calm.

However, he knew that he must rest for a time.

Quite suddenly, he informed Amrit Kaur that he was going to Sevagram. To Miraben he had sent a note on 8 August 1944 saying that Sevagram 'has grown out of all proportion.' He urged her to 'go slow, make no haste, in choosing the soil' for a small ashram she planned to establish herself, in the northwest United Provinces.

Unwillingly, he admitted that his strength had given out. At the ashram he began a new departure, to make the place a model not only of social, economic, and political ideals, but also of interfaith unity. At a wedding of two Hindu members, he substituted for the ancient *Septapada* – the seven sacred steps about a marriage pole – 'seven steps of service to mankind,' pledged solemnly by bride and groom. The seven steps might be building a hut for the poor, nursing a sick child, helping the aged, spinning khadi, teaching a village class, looking after a peasant mother, aiding in building a village road. The ceremony itself was performed by a Harijan, who was also a Christian.

Meanwhile, he was working with Miraben – by mail – on a plan she had in mind. She wanted to initiate a 'Government scheme for cattle development in the reserve forests near Rikishesh.' She had already selected the site for her ashram. She needed only to build a small cottage on the bank of the Ganges, which flowed by.

In April 1946, he had heard from Mira that she had been appointed Honorary Adviser to the Provisional Government, in a 'Grow More Food Campaign.' It meant long trips, endless public talks. But she did not feel she could refuse the task, since it was within the circumference of all that Gandhi himself believed an essential concern. However, when she completed her work she suffered a breakdown; it was necessary to take a long rest at Mussoorie. Gandhi, though deeply troubled by her physical collapse, at the same time did not fail to remember the ashram she had in mind. He sent her a detailed, practical letter regarding the most advisable way to arrange latrines at the place, when she would eventually go there to live.

Remaining in the quiet ashram was impossible to Gandhi for

long. He heard from Amrit Kaur that four thousand people in the Punjab had been killed within a few months. Fleeing refugees changed into mobs, wrecking houses, burning one another's temples, committing murder. In October, just after his seventy-seventh birthday, Gandhi went with Nehru from village to village, to quiet the riots blazing on all sides. As always, his appearance calmed the people. Only with Jinnah had he no influence. While he worked at the task he knew must be done, celebrations in his honour were being held in many cities, as usual. In Hyderabad, Sarojini Naidu prophesied to a great assemblage gathered before her: 'The influence of Mohandas Gandhi will endure and shape the ideas of the world's civilization over centuries to come!' In the United States, Albert Einstein cabled to Gandhi a greeting: 'In ages to come, people will not believe such a man as this one walked the earth.' But in the district of Punjab, Amrit Kaur learned that seventy-five women had thrown themselves — within four minutes — into a well, to die and so escape from attack by hoodlums. Children everywhere were being literally torn alive; babies had their brains dashed out. Wherever Hindu and Moslem met there was bloodshed and frightful brutality, as fear and hatred whipped the people to always greater violence.

It was not easy to explain, to foreign peoples, how Gandhi — who had been victorious in his *Satyagraha* with Britain — could fail to keep his people from destroying one another, with Britain preparing to leave his country to itself. As best she could, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit showed her listeners, as she told the press also, that it was not Gandhi, but Jinnah, who created the war within her land.

35

LADY MOUNTBATTEN

BRITAIN FOUND IT necessary to send a new Viceroy in February 1947 — Lord Louis Mountbatten, cousin to George VI and great-grandson of Victoria. He was the twentieth vice-regal representative, since Victoria was crowned 'Empress of

India.' He was to be the last Viceroy. On arrival at Delhi, Mountbatten astonished the world, by calling in person upon Gandhi, in the Mahatma's small stone hut at the Sweeper's Colony. Four days later, Gandhi and Jinnah were invited to meet the Viceroy together. The Moslem leader would not agree to any suggestion Gandhi proposed, for a united India, after independence came.

The Viceroy found in himself admiration and respect for the tiny Mahatma. His wife asked Gandhi to tea. He arrived of course in Harijan loin cloth and sandals, and she received him with graciousness and dignity. She fell in love with the old man whose face was lined by long years of suffering, toil, and sorrow, and she became one of his helpers in work with the refugees; the Viceroy and she adopted some of the refugee children. She also joined Amrit Kaur in work with the wounded, the hungry and orphaned.

But there was no lessening of violence, anywhere. Lord Mountbatten wrote to the King that independence earlier than planned seemed the only means to restore sanity and order. News of his letter rang throughout the world. Madam Pandit straightway took a plane from the United States for home. Two days earlier the Duke of Windsor was reported to have offered himself as future Governor of India. But even that did not now make news, amidst the crisis in India itself.

Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit found Congress meeting in fateful session. Gandhi had pleaded with Jinnah: 'Cut me in two, but do not cut India in two.' Now, the Empire asked whether Jinnah's demand for partition of the country in two states would be accepted by the Congress leaders.

Nehru had been as a son to Gandhi for thirty-one years. His whole family had been disciples of the Mahatma; three of his kinspeople had died, following Gandhi. But there were such horrors in the land, as had not been conceived possible, among the people themselves. In one city the fathers of one hundred and twenty young maidens killed them to prevent their ravishment by a hate-crazed mob. It seemed to Nehru that a course must be chosen rapidly and the one course open, quickly, was by agreeing to Jinnah's demand for a divided land. Vijaya Lakshmi's brother voted for the partition of India.

Early in July 1947, George VI – the great-grandson of

Victoria, who had been Queen and Empress of India – announced at a grand session of his Parliament, that the title of 'Emperor' was abandoned. On August 15 throughout India the British flag was pulled down and the tricolour went up in its place.

Mountbatten remained as head of Hindu India; but there were two states – and the other was Pakistan, of which Jinnah, leader of the Moslem League, was head on his own insistence. 29 August, Amrit Kaur received a note from Gandhi:

You must not lose faith in humanity. Humanity is an ocean. If a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty.

But his heart seemed too full of pain to bear. There were 'en million people battling their way across the frontiers dividing the newly-created nations. Wherever Moslem and Hindu met, there followed destruction and death. Gandhi said to another friend: 'I have worked for thirty-two years; and it has come to naught.' All that he had lived by, and lived for, was denied, was mocked, by the fruits of his victory.

On his seventy-eighth birthday, in October 1947, his customary long lines of visitors came to wish him well, the long hours through. Lady Mountbatten arrived, with greetings from Amrit Kaur, and a gift as well as congratulations from the Viceroy and herself. In her and her husband, Gandhi had met again that chivalry, graciousness and gentleness which made the English character at its best, as he had discovered it when a young student in London in 1887, sixty years before. But there was no answering warmth in his voice as he acknowledged her words. He said, instead: 'I see no reason for congratulations. There is nothing but agony in my heart, over the hatred and killings.'

Nevertheless, on 22 October he found time to send a wedding gift to a kinswoman of Lady Mountbatten – her cousin's daughter, Princess Elizabeth, elder child of the King of England. The gift sent was a tablecloth woven by Gandhi himself. The simple piece of homespun linen was news when it arrived at Buckingham Palace. It seemed as dramatic that Gandhi had sent it, as that the King's daughter received it. The young princess, heir to the throne because of her uncle's abdication, would in due time become sovereign of a realm in

which India was no longer 'the most precious jewel of the Crown.'

To her great-great-grandmother Victoria, the loss of India would have seemed incredible. Even more incredible, would it have been to her that a small man in India had brought it about almost solely by his own effort, and wholly without armies, without ammunition of any kind except faith in love and justice.

The wedding in November of the pretty young princess had the aura of a fairy tale, including even a handsome prince as the groom. But there was in it also the pomp implied in nuptials of a future ruler who would govern a realm still mighty among the peoples of the earth. She was to be, when her time came to reign, the first female monarch since Victoria herself.

There was something in this which caught the imagination of the world. But in India, the story of women's place in government was perhaps as arresting, humble though the individuals involved were, one by one. Gandhi had won for the Harijan rights never granted before – suffrage, privileges of worship in all temples, opportunity to work at all occupations, entry into all public eating places, even the choice of marrying with women of upper castes. There were fifty million Untouchables freed from age-long discrimination, oppression and shame. But there remained half of the population – the women. Now they, too, were acknowledged as human beings, not chattels, possessions, of their men.

To be sure, they continued to live in purdah when married. In thousands of homes, the wife on rising still went to her husband, knelt before him and kissed his feet in greeting, humbly. Nonetheless, suffrage was granted all women, the right to inherit was given them, and even the privilege of asking for divorce was provided, by law. They took many posts in the government. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit told the press, vividly: 'There are fifty-five of our women in high positions – more than in any other land!'

She herself was named Minister to the Soviet Union. Amrit Kaur was made Minister of Health. Sarojini Naidu was scheduled to become Governor of a province; although approaching seventy, and all at once an old woman in appearance, she did not flinch from the responsibility of accepting

sixty million people in her charge. Sushila Nayyar was chosen to head an organization established in Kasturba Gandhi's memory, with a fund of \$40,000,000 to be spent in care of mothers and children. Therewith, she too, became part of the new world Gandhi had opened to the women of her people.

Only one – Miraben – remained outside. A newspaper announced: 'Miraben has parted from the Mahatma.' A magazine said, not without marked malice:

'Last week, Miraben still had her platonic love for Gandhi, but at a distance. Months ago she fell in love with another Gandhi disciple, handsome, well-built Prithir Singh, 55. Gandhi, who swears his converts to celibacy, offered to make an exception, but Singh refused to marry Miraben. Soon after the war he split with Gandhi because a Communist, and married another girl. Then Miraben wearied of the jealousies and squabbles of the ashram at Sevagram. She moved to the Himalayan foothills, founded an ashram of her own.'

Possibly a Jinnah supporter sent the material; it may have been even that a reporter, struggling to bring the name of Madeleine Slade into the current news of Princess Elizabeth's romantic marriage, however indirectly, concocted the story.

Miraben did not deign to explain, reply or deny. She was a woman of fifty-five; she could not but have realized long years ago that malice toward her was meant for Gandhi also. He was her reason for abandoning her people, her country, her faith.

She had been consulting him about her ashram since leaving Poona. He had helped her select a site. He had advised her on the programme she followed. He had discussed a name for the place. He had told her how to obtain members, and what to ask in membership requirements. But she had been ill.

She came on 16 September, to remain for three months. It was necessary to have her heart examined. While she was arranging for this, she came down with a malignant malaria. Though Gandhi was then in Calcutta, he returned at once to see her. There were riots in Delhi, however; it was necessary for him to speak to the mobs, and quiet them. Wherever he went, he invariably could bring order out of the most serious disturbances, as Miraben and the others knew.

He stayed at Birla House, because the Delhi Harijan quarters, where he had been making it his practice to live – as he did in every large city to which he came – had no rooms for him at the time. Miraben therefore had ‘three precious months with Bapu.’ She tried to regain her health; he spent the day speaking with the people. But in the evening she could see him, hear what he had done, and learn what he planned.

He was profoundly unhappy, himself.

She returned to her ashram at Rikishesh on 18 December 1947. Gandhi remained in the city. He felt that he had failed in all that he had worked for. There was such hatred between Moslem and Hindu, everywhere he went, that it was as if a civil war had been created through attainment of freedom from Britain.

Early in January 1948, he set out – barefoot, as on a holy pilgrimage – to plead with the people of Pakistan and Hindu India both, to cease their bloodshed. He trudged hundreds of miles afoot, the tiny man of nearly eighty years. But it was in vain, he felt.

On 13 January, he entered upon a fast in Delhi, explaining his reason:

A fast is the sincerest form of prayer. It does not mean coercion of anyone. It does of course exercise pressure on individuals, even on Government, but this is a natural and moral result of an act of sacrifice. It stirs up sluggish consciences and inspires loving hearts to act. Those who have to bring about radical changes in human conditions and surroundings, cannot do it, without raising a ferment in society.

The last phases had his own humour and the truth which was always in it.

Long lines of people came to his cot, as he lay, a tiny figure, fasting. The third day, Sushila Nayyar begged him to take some water, because of acetone particles in his kidneys. He smiled in answer: ‘That is because I have not enough faith.’ When the young scientist protested that ‘this is a chemical reaction,’ he returned: ‘There is more in life than science, and there is more in God, than chemistry.’

On the sixth day Moslem, Sikh, and Hindu representatives

met beside the small fasting man and solemnly pledged themselves to see that murders, riots ceased.

Gandhi had won what he sought for his people, insofar as Jinnah let it be possible.

He had succeeded in what he had begun to seek for Harijans, even in South Africa over fifty years ago.

He had opened a world to the women of his people. Out of society girls, sheltered wives, cloistered students, out of plain working girls, out of a princess, he made leaders for new India. He demanded greatness of them and they found it in themselves – because of the need for greatness in them. He had made Sarojini Naidu, even twenty-five years ago, the head of their people, as the young princess of England was one day to head her people.

One morning during his fast Sushila Nayyar had asked him why he had made motions with his arms, as if climbing. He said that he had been dreaming the night through that he tried to climb over a wall and yet had never managed to reach its top. But even in his dreams he had never ceased to climb.

He returned to Sevagram. There he received young men and young women as well – to show them that they must grow to the ideal he held for them. He had only begun the story of India's future. To Amrit Kaur he had written not so long ago: 'I think I have not even an enemy in the world.'

Shortly after the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, it was reported that Winston Churchill had said that, after all, India remained part of the Commonwealth of Britain. Gandhi was not so bad, in the end. The little royal bride would one day deal with the Mahatma, it seemed, as had her grandfather and father. Gandhi told a reporter that he 'expected to live one hundred and twenty-five years at least.'

36

SAROJINI NAIDU

GANDHI HAD BEEN ASKED, during the Second World War: 'What would you do, if an aeroplane flew above Sevagram, and began dropping bombs? You would not follow non-resistance then?' He had answered with his very endearing, toothless smile: 'I would go out and lift my face to the skies where the airship was. They would not see my face. But they would see that I had come out and stood there. They would know I lifted the face of love to them. I believe they would pass me without sending down harm.' What was astounding was that his whole life proved that he made this a practical, frequently the only practical, procedure to be used. He lived, now that peace was restored to his people, divided though they still were, in the austere ashram he had created on a pattern he first chose forty-four years before. By 30 January 1948 he was at New Delhi, however, because he felt it was necessary to effect unity between two of his old friends – Patel and Nehru, who often seemed at odds. Nehru was Premier of the new India and Patel, Deputy Premier.

In Birla House, Gandhi met Patel for a talk which lasted much longer than had been expected; but they parted in affection and with promises to Gandhi that his wishes would be regarded. The Mahatma then hurried to the gardens, where a large assembly already waited to join him in the public prayer meetings he held there, whenever he was in the city. His two young granddaughters met him, and, with hands on their shoulders, the tiny, aged figure made haste toward the prayer grounds.

A young man moved toward them, bowing reverently, and Gandhi paused to join his own two palms in blessing, for often pilgrims silently asked the Mahatma – by a glance or a lift of their head – for blessing. There was the sound of three shots, and Gandhi fell back, whispering 'Rama . . . Rama,' – 'Oh, God

... Oh, God.' It was a prayer which, when he was a very small boy, his old nurse had taught him to say, if he were in pain or anxiety. He had been shot in the abdomen by a member of his own faith, a Hindu – a young editor, who belonged to the Rashtriya Sevak Sangha, an organization of young Hindus who hated Gandhi, believing that he had yielded shamefully in permitting India to be divided into two nations.

A half hour later, the Mahatma was dead.

Miraben – at her ashram – heard over her radio at half-past seven in the evening that he had been killed. She had come out to the verandah of her hut to rest for a few moments. She said: 'For me there were only two, God, and Bapu. Now, they have become one.'

The brother of Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit, Jawaharlal Nehru, spoke for all India: 'The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.' The Viceroy spoke for Lady Mountbatten and himself: 'Gandhi cannot be compared with ordinary statesmen – like Roosevelt or Churchill; his people classify Gandhi simply with Mohammed, and Christ.'

The shrunken body which had been Gandhi was bathed by his disciples; it was dressed, perfumed, and covered with flowers, then carried to a funeral pyre. In the vast multitude following it to the waiting mound of wood which was to be lighted in last rites, was one man unnoticed by the rest, absorbed in grief – Harilal, Gandhi's eldest son. He disappeared even before his other brothers could speak to him; he made plain it was only because of their mother that he had come at all. He was now a derelict, an habitual drunkard. Whether he watched the body burn in the flames which his brothers lighted, nobody knew. He was to die, an outcast, shortly.

Amid the thousands kneeling on the earth about the pyre was an Englishwoman, wife of the Governor General of India, and cousin by marriage to a King who was third in line from Victoria as occupant of the throne. Lady Mountbatten was one of those who wept for Gandhi.

It was strange that Gandhi's ashes were carried to the sacred Jumna in a flower-decked vehicle which had been used to carry weapons of war. Full military honours were given him, who had with his whole life denied war; there was a line of tanks and armoured trucks, then the Viceroy's limousine, and mounted

cavalry and troops representing the Army and Navy following. In the air, planes strewed flowers down to the river where Gandhi's ashes were sent to drift over the waters. The carrier, which had brought the ashes to the point at which the Ganges and Jumna met, was drawn all the way from his pyre by soldiers with four long ropes. But to him, if he knew what now happened on earth, it would have meant only that those who held to ways of war, at the end brought him their tenderness, honour and love. To him, as it was to those who loved him, what would have been vital was the fact that his ashes drifted down the river at the same place where, four years earlier, Kasturba's small mound of ashes also had been sent, after her sons gathered them from the prison grounds at Poona.

From London the King sent word that his own heart was filled with sorrow at the passing of one of the noblest men who had ever lived:

The Queen and I are deeply shocked by the news of death of Mr. Gandhi. Will you please convey to the people of India our sincere sympathy, in the irreparable loss they, and indeed mankind, have suffered.

For Gandhi's followers, for his people, Nehru, who had been as a son to him, said over the radio to all India: 'The father of the nation is no more.' But to those nearest him, the loss was personal, never to be filled by another leader. Amrit Kaur said: 'In the twinkling of an eye, our greatest and most beloved friend was taken from us. Not for nothing did we call him Bapu . . . and we are today orphaned.'

It was Sarojini Naidu who found the words to speak for them all. The day after his funeral she said before the Congress, her garments those of mourning:

'There is no occasion for me to speak today. The voice of the world in many languages has spoken already . . . Some of us have been so closely associated with him that our lives and his life were an integral part of one another. Some of us are indeed dead, in him . . . Of what avail will be our faith, our loyalty to him, if we dared not believe all is not lost because his body is gone from our midst?

'The time is over for private sorrow. The time is over for beating of breasts and tearing of hair. The time is

here and now to stand up and say, '*We take up the challenge, with those who defied Mahatma Gandhi!* . . .

We are his living symbols. We are his soldiers. We are the carriers of his banner before an embattled world! Our banner is truth, our shield is non-violence, our sword is the sword of the spirit that conquers without a blow!

Shall we not follow in the footsteps of our master? Shall we not obey the mandates of our father?

Though his voice will not speak again, have we not a million, million voices to bear his message to the world?

Here and now, I -- for one -- before the world that listens to my quivering voice, pledge myself as I did more than thirty years ago, to the service of the Mahatma!

Mohandas Gandhi -- whose frail body was committed to the flames today -- is not dead! May the soul of my master, my leader, my father, rest NOT in peace!

NOT in peace -- my father -- do not rest! Keep us to our pledge! Give us strength to fulfil our promises -- your heirs, your descendants, guardians of your dreams, fulfillers of India's destiny!

* * *

She herself continued her task as Governor of a province. On 1 March 1949 she died in Lucknow of a heart attack after an illness of three weeks. In a black-bordered, extraordinary Gazette, the Government paid her tribute as 'brilliant orator, great poet, a person endowed with unusual charm and sense of humour,' as well as genius in oratory, administrative skills, and popular leadership.

On 26 June, three months after Madam Naidu's passing, Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit left India, to serve as its Ambassador to the United States, one of the most important diplomatic posts in the world. This writer saw her in Philadelphia in November of that year, gowned in purple sari draped over a violet gown, her white hair a crown about her head.

That same month Sushila Nayyar came to Pendle Hill, while on a tour of the United States, to study our child-care centres,

which she planned to use as a model for work among mothers and children in India. Later, she went for a time to Johns Hopkins University. She married one of Gandhi's disciples, but returned alone, presently, to her assigned task for her people.

Mrdulla Sarabhai became head of an organization to care for 'abandoned women' – the many who had been deserted and left without care in the riots following partition. She also took charge of a refugee centre, and soon this became her permanent task.

Amrit Kaur continued as Minister of Health to the federal Government of India.

Sonya Schlesin was still in South Africa, a quiet old woman, in her sixties, retired from her work as head of a girls' school.

Miraben's ashram at Rikishesh, North India, in the Himalayan foothills, drew perhaps twenty-five disciples presently, with herself as leader or *guru*. Age made her almost plump, with a sweet motherliness not seen before in her features. Her concern became more and more the protection of India's cows, who – she sometimes smiled – seemed to her in need of someone's care, with all the world giving thought to human beings only. Her religion appeared to have become – as Gandhi's had been – an adaption of Hinduism. In saffron sari, she still follows the task she undertook. It is, after all, only one aspect of the duty Gandhi had pointed out to her: he had told her to help teach the people how to care for their beasts, as they did not care for themselves. That too, was being done for him, by the Englishwoman who abandoned people, family, country, and faith, for him.

Gandhi's ashram at Sageon became a training centre for workers to aid new India; among its teachers were women who had been trained by him, and who carried his vision, as a light, to his people.

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